

APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES PATENT

in the name of

**Barry Appelman, David Gang, Kristine Krantz,
Brian Heikes, James A. Odell, Justin Uberti,
Andrew L. Wick, Xiaoyan Yin, and Xiaopeng Zhang**

of

America Online, Inc.

for

Chat Personalization

Fish & Richardson P.C.
1425 K Street, NW
11th Floor
Washington, DC 20005
Tel.: (202) 783-5070
Fax: (202) 783-2331

ATTORNEY DOCKET:

06975-505001

Chat Personalization

This application claims priority from U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/384,147, filed May 31, 2002, and U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/416,902, filed October 9, 2002, and is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Application Nos. 10/305,015, filed 5 November 27, 2002, 10/334,027, filed December 31, 2002, 10/334,128, filed December 31, 2002, and 10/334,129, filed December 31, 2002, each of which is incorporated by reference.

TECHNICAL FIELD

This description relates to chat communications and more particularly to 10 personalization of chat communications.

BACKGROUND

Online service providers facilitate access to information and services by providing interactive User Interfaces (UIs) that help users navigate to desired resources. For example, in the case of a system for communicating using chat messages, a UI allows a 15 first chat participant to invoke actions, such as establishing a communications link, through the selection of screen objects such as icons, windows, and drop-down menus. The design of a UI has a significant impact on a first chat participant's online experience. In particular, the icons, the windows, and the menus of a UI may be arranged to enable a first chat participant to locate information and services quickly and easily.

20 SUMMARY

In one general aspect, perception of a personalization item is enabled in a chat communications session by rendering, on a second chat participant system, a chat application user interface for a chat communications session involving at least a second chat participant and a first chat participant. An identifier is obtained that enables 25 identification of a personalization item of an individual chat user, and the identifier is associated with the personalization item. The personalization item is obtained independently of the message used to obtain the identifier, and the personalization item is rendered at the second chat participant system.

Implementations may include one or more of the following features. For example, the individual chat user may be the first chat participant or the second chat participant. The identifier may be obtained by receiving the identifier in a chat message from the first chat participant system. One or more identifiers associated with one or more personalization items for one or more chat users at a chat host system may be stored, the identity of the individual chat user may be received at the chat host system, an identifier associated with the individual chat user may be accessed, and the associated identifier in a message may be sent from the chat host system.

The identifier may be obtained, for example, by locating the identifier at the second chat participant system or by retrieving the identifier from a remote data store. The location of the personalization item also may be obtained.

In one implementation, the identifier is obtained by receiving the identifier included with a chat message. In another implementation, the identifier is obtained by receiving the identifier upon a change in the presence state of the individual chat user.

In one implementation, the personalization item may be provided by a third party, and may be enabled to be rendered in consideration of a payment. In another implementation, the personalization item may be configured to expire upon the occurrence of a predetermined event such as, for example, the passage of a predetermined length of time, the passage of a predetermined date, or a predetermined number of uses. In other implementations, a determination is made whether the personalization item has been banned or has expired, and if so, display of an expired personalization item may be disallowed.

The personalization item may be obtained by determining whether the personalization item associated with the received identifier is available at the second chat participant system, retrieving the personalization item from the second chat participant system if the personalization item is available at the second chat participant system, and requesting the personalization item from a remote source and receiving the personalization item from the remote source at the second chat participant system if the personalization item is not available at the second chat participant system.

In one implementation, the personalization item may be requested by identifying the remote source. In another implementation, the personalization item is requested from

a chat host. In another implementation, the personalization item is requested from a first chat participant system. In yet another implementation, the personalization item is requested from a third-party server. For example, the personalization item may be requested from a server authorized as a partner to a chat host.

5 The personalization item includes a graphic, such as an icon, a sound, a wallpaper capable of being rendered on a chat application user interface, an animation sequence, a video segment, or a customized binary object provided by the first chat participant. The personalization item may also include a customized binary object that is uploaded by the first chat participant to a server.

10 In one implementation, the identifier includes an item type, a data size, and one or more flags such as, for example, a custom item flag, an official item flag, a banned item flag, and a redirect to different item flag.

 The personalization item may be updated. Also, the actual format of the personalization item may be compared to an expected format of the personalization item
15 based upon the identifier.

 In another general aspect, a user interface on a display enables perception of communications that leverage a chat platform. The user interface includes a module for rendering a chat application user interface for a chat communications session involving at least a first chat participant and a second chat participant. The user interface is presented
20 at the system display of the second chat participant, and also includes a module for receiving a personalization item presented to the system display. The personalization item is associated with an individual chat user and corresponds to an identifier obtained by the second chat participant system. The identifier enables identification of a personalization item of the individual chat user. The user interface also includes a
25 module for rendering the personalization item independently of the message used to obtain the identifier.

 Implementations may include one or more of the following features. For example, the individual chat user includes the first chat participant and the second chat participant.

30 In one implementation, the personalization item is rendered upon the occurrence of a change in the presence state of the individual chat user. In another implementation,

the identifier is obtained by receiving the identifier from a first chat participant system in a chat message.

In one implementation, the identifier is obtaining from the chat host system. The chat host system stores one or more identifiers associated with one or more
5 personalization items for one or more chat users, the chat host system receives the identity of the individual chat user, and accesses an identifier associated with the individual chat user.

In another implementation, the identifier is retrieved from the second chat participant system. In another implementation, the identifier is retrieved from a remote
10 data store.

The personalization item may include any of the items noted above. The personalization item may be provided by a third party, and may be enabled to be rendered in consideration of a payment. The personalization item also may be configured to expire upon the occurrence of a predetermined event such as, for example, the passage of a
15 predetermined length of time, the passage of a predetermined date, or a predetermined number of uses.

Aspects of the chat personalization may be implemented by an apparatus and/or by a computer program stored on a computer readable medium. The computer readable medium may comprise a disc, a client device, a host device, and/or a propagated signal.
20 In addition, aspects of the chat personalization may be implemented in a client/host context or in a standalone or offline client device. The chat personalization items may be rendered in a client/host context and may be accessed or updated through a remote device in a client/host environment. The chat personalization items also may be rendered by the standalone/offline device and may be accessed or updated through a remote device in a
25 non-client/host environment such as, for example, a LAN server serving an end user or a mainframe serving a terminal device.

In one general aspect, perception of a personalization item in a chat communications session may be enabled by storing on a host system one or more personalization items associated with a chat application operator, receiving a request
30 from a chat participant system for the personalization items associated with the chat application operator, accessing the personalization items at the host system, and

communicating the personalization items from the host system to the chat participant system for rendering in a chat application running on the chat participant system.

Implementations may include one or more of the following features. For example, the request may also include an identity of the chat participant, and the
5 personalization items associated with the received identity may be accessed. The request may also include an identifier that enables identification of a personalization item associated with the chat application operator. The identifier may include a location on the host system of the personalization item, an item type and a data size, a custom item flag, an official item flag, a banned item flag, or a redirect to different item flag. The identifier
10 for a personalization item may be created based upon the application of an algorithm to at least a portion of item data. Based on the identifier, if it is determined that the personalization item is already stored at the host, then the host may decline to redundantly store the personalization item. Also, the identifier may be used to determine whether the personalization item is an official item, and the personalization item may be
15 displayed if it is an official item.

The host may be a server authorized as a partner to a chat host. The personalization items stored at the host include a graphic, such as an icon, a sound, wallpaper capable of being rendered on a chat application user interface, an animation sequence, and a video segment.

20 The personalization items may be configured to expire upon the occurrence of a predetermined event, such as the passage of a predetermined length of time or the passage of a predetermined date, or a predetermined number of uses. If it is determined that the personalization item has expired, access to the personalization item may be disallowed. If it is determined that the personalization item has been banned, access to
25 the personalization item may be disallowed.

In another general aspect, perception of a personalization item in a chat communications session may be enabled by rendering, on a chat participant system, a chat application user interface for a chat communications session involving at least a chat application operator and another chat participant, identifying personalization items
30 associated with the chat application operator that are located external to the chat

participant system, and communicating personalization items associated with the chat application operator to the chat participant system.

Implementations may include one or more of the following features. For example, identifying the personalization items includes identifying a remote source
 5 location for the personalization items. The personalization items may be located on a chat host. Personalization items include a graphic, such as an icon, a sound, wallpaper capable of being rendered on a chat application user interface, an animation sequence, a video segment, and a customized binary object uploaded by the chat participant to a server. The personalization item may be enabled to be rendered in consideration of a
 10 payment for such rendering, and may be configured to expire upon the occurrence of a predetermined event such as the passage of a predetermined length of time or the passage of a predetermined date, or a predetermined number of uses. If it is determined that the personalization item has expired, display of the personalization item may be disallowed. If it is determined that the personalization item has been banned, display of the
 15 personalization item may be disallowed. The personalization item may be updated.

Communicating the personalization items may include obtaining an identifier enabling identification of a personalization item associated with the chat application operator, obtaining the personalization item from a source other than a message used to obtain the identifier, and rendering the personalization item at the chat participant system.

20 Obtaining the identifier includes sending an identity of the chat participant to a chat host system and receiving one or more identifiers in a message from the chat host system, the identifiers being associated at the chat host system with one or more personalization items, where the personalization items are associated with the identity of the chat participant. Obtaining the identifier also includes retrieving the identifier from a
 25 remote data store or receiving the identifier upon a change in a presence state of the chat participant. The location of the personalization item may be obtained with the identifier. The identifier may include an item type, a data size, a custom item flag, an official item flag, a banned item flag, or a redirect to a different item flag.

Obtaining the personalization item includes obtaining an identifier enabling
 30 identification of a personalization item associated with the chat application operator, determining whether the personalization item associated with the received identifier is

available at the chat participant system, retrieving the personalization item from the chat participant system if the personalization item is available at the chat participant system, and requesting the personalization item from a remote source and receiving the personalization item from the remote source at the chat participant system if the
5 personalization item is not available at the chat participant system.

Requesting the personalization item may include identifying the remote source. Also, the personalization item may be requested from a chat host.

An identifier for a personalization item may be created based upon the application of an algorithm to at least a portion of the item data. The identifier may be
10 created, for example, for a personalization item stored at the chat participant system. If it is determined, based on the identifier, that the personalization item is stored at the host system, the host may decline to redundantly store the personalization item. Also, if it is determined based on the identifier that the personalization item is an official item, then the personalization item may be displayed.

15 The personalization item may include any of the items noted above. The personalization item may be provided by a third party, and may be enabled to be rendered in consideration of a payment. The personalization item also may be configured to expire upon the occurrence of a predetermined event such as, for example, the passage of a predetermined length of time, the passage of a predetermined date, or a predetermined
20 number of uses.

Aspects of the chat personalization may be implemented by an apparatus and/or by a computer program stored on a computer readable medium. The computer readable medium may comprise a disc, a client device, a host device, and/or a propagated signal. In addition, aspects of the chat personalization may be implemented in a client/host
25 context or in a standalone or offline client device. The chat personalization items may be rendered in a client/host context and may be accessed or updated through a remote device in a client/host environment. The chat personalization items also may be rendered by the standalone/offline device and may be accessed or updated through a remote device in a non-client/host environment such as, for example, a LAN server serving an end user or a
30 mainframe serving a terminal device.

In one general aspect, perception of a personalization item in a chat communications session may be enabled by perceiving an identifier corresponding to an intended second chat participant designated by a first chat participant system, accessing personalization items corresponding to the perceived identifier, and making perceivable
5 the personalization items corresponding to the received identifier to the first chat participant system for rendering in a chat application running on the first chat participant system, where the personalization items are made perceivable prior to communication with the intended second chat participant.

Implementations may include one or more of the following features. For
10 example, one or more personalization items may be stored. Personalization items may be accessed on a host system, and also may be communicated from the host system to the first chat participant system.

The personalization items may be made perceivable at times including prior to communication of a chat message with the intended second chat participant system,
15 before a communications session is established with the intended second chat participant system, before the first chat participant system sends a message to the intended second chat participant system, and before the first chat participant system receives a message from the intended second chat participant system.

Perceiving the identifier may include receiving an identity of the intended second
20 chat participant and accessing an identifier associated with the individual intended second chat participant based upon the received identity. Receiving the identifier may also include receiving a location of the personalization item, such as, for example, a location on the host system. The identifier may also include an item type, a data size, a flag such as a custom item flag, an official item flag, a banned item flag, and a redirect to different
25 item flag.

The personalization item may include a graphic, such as an icon, a sound, wallpaper capable of being rendered on a chat application user interface, an animation sequence, a video segment, and a customized binary object provided by the intended second chat participant. The personalization item may be provided by a party other than
30 the intended second chat participant, and may be enabled to be rendered in consideration of a payment.

The personalization item may be configured to expire upon the occurrence of a predetermined event including the passage of a predetermined length of time or on passage of a predetermined date or a predetermined number of uses. If it is determined that the personalization item has expired, access to the personalization item may be disallowed. If it is determined that the personalization item has been banned, access to the personalization item may be disallowed.

In another general aspect, perception of a personalization item in a chat communications session may be enabled by rendering, on a first chat participant system, a chat application user interface for a chat communications session involving at least an intended second chat participant and a first chat participant and rendering, at the first chat participant system, a personalization item associated with the second chat participant prior to communication with the intended second chat participant system.

Implementations may include one or more of the following features. For example, the personalization item may be rendered at the first chat participant system prior to communication of a chat message with the intended second chat participant system., before a communications session is established with the intended second chat participant system, before the first chat participant system sends a message to the intended second chat participant system, or before the first chat participant system receives a message from the intended second chat participant system.

The identifier may be associated with the personalization item, the personalization item may be obtained from a source other than a message used to obtain the identifier, and the personalization item may be rendered at the first chat participant system. The identifier may include a location of the personalization item. The identifier also may include an item type, a data size, and a flag such as a custom item flag, an official item flag, a banned item flag, or a redirect to different item flag.

Obtaining the identifier may include sending an identity of the intended second chat participant to a chat host system, where the chat host system stores one or more identifiers associated with one or more personalization items for the intended second chat participant, and receiving an identifier associated with the individual intended second chat participant in a message from the chat host system. Obtaining the identifier also

may include locating the identifier at the intended second chat participant system and retrieving the identifier from a remote data store.

Obtaining the personalization item may include determining whether the personalization item associated with the received identifier is available at the first chat participant system, retrieving the personalization item from the first chat participant system if the personalization item is available at the first chat participant system, and requesting the personalization item from a remote source and receiving the personalization item from the remote source at the first chat participant system if the personalization item is not available at the first chat participant system. The identifier may be received upon a change in a presence state of the intended second chat participant.

The personalization item may include a graphic, such as an icon, a sound, wallpaper capable of being rendered on a chat application user interface, an animation sequence, a video segment, and a customized binary object provided by the intended second chat participant. The personalization item may be provided by a party other than the intended second chat participant and may be enabled to be rendered in consideration of a payment. The personalization item may be updated, and may be configured to expire upon the occurrence of a predetermined event, including the passage of a predetermined length of time or on passage of a predetermined date or a predetermined number of uses. If it is determined that the personalization item has expired, display of the personalization item may be disallowed. If it is determined that the personalization item has been banned, display of the personalization item may be disallowed.

Requesting the personalization item may include identifying the remote source, requesting the personalization item from a chat host, or requesting the personalization item from a third-party server. The third-party server includes a server authorized as a partner to a chat host. The personalization item may include any of the items noted above. The personalization item may be provided by a third party, and may be enabled to be rendered in consideration of a payment. The personalization item also may be configured to expire upon the occurrence of a predetermined event such as, for example, the passage of a predetermined length of time, the passage of a predetermined date, or a predetermined number of uses.

Techniques are described for chat customization. In one general aspect, perception of personalization item in a chat communications session may be enabled by rendering, on a chat message recipient system, a chat application user interface for a chat communications session involving at least one instant message recipient and a chat message sender, receiving a message that includes a text message and personalization item to be displayed by the second chat participant when perceiving the text message, the personalization item being selected by the instant message sender system, and rendering the personalization item at the instant message recipient system when rendering another portion of the message.

Implementations may include one or more of the following features. For example, receiving the message includes receiving personalization item that has been automatically selected by the instant message sender system. Receiving the message may also include receiving at least a portion of the personalization item in a chat message from a chat message sender system, in a message generated upon a change in a presence state of the first chat participant, or at least a portion of the personalization item may be provided by a host other than the instant message host. The personalization item may be enabled to be rendered in consideration of a payment. Also, the personalization item may be configured to expire upon the occurrence of a predetermined event such as passage of a predetermined length of time or passage of a predetermined date, or a predetermined number of uses. If it is determined that the predetermined event has occurred, display of the personalization item may be disallowed. If it is determined that the personalization item has been banned, display of the personalization item may be disallowed. The determination of whether the personalization item has been banned may be based, for example, on a report by a user or on a violation of a term of service agreement.

In another general aspect, transportation of personalization item in a chat communications session may be enabled by rendering, on a chat message sender system, a chat application user interface for a chat communications session involving at least one instant message recipient and a chat message sender, accessing personalization item to be displayed by a chat message recipient, the personalization item being selected by the instant message sender system, selecting a chat message recipient, and sending a message

to the selected instant message recipient, the message including at least a portion of the personalization item associated with the instant message sender.

Implementations may include one or more of the following features. For example, personalization item may be automatically selected by the instant message sender system. Personalization item may be accessed on the instant message sender system or on a chat message host system, including a host system than a chat message host system.

Personalization item may be selected by the instant message sender system, and may be stored on a chat message host system or on the instant message sender system.

The personalization item may be sent in a message generated upon a change in a presence state of the first chat participant, and at least a portion of the personalization item may be provided by a host other than a chat message host. The personalization item may be enabled to be rendered in consideration of a payment and may be configured to expire upon the occurrence of a predetermined event such as the passage of a predetermined length of time or passage of a predetermined date, or a predetermined number of uses. If it is determined that personalization item has expired based on determining whether the predetermined event has occurred, sending of the personalization item may be disallowed. If it determined that the personalization item has been banned, sending of the personalization item may be disallowed. The determination of whether the personalization item has been banned may be based, for example, on a report by a user or on a violation of a term of service agreement.

The personalization item may be provided by a third party such as a server other than the chat host, and may be enabled to be rendered in consideration of a payment. The personalization item also may be configured to expire upon the occurrence of a predetermined event such as, for example, the passage of a predetermined length of time, the passage of a predetermined date, or a predetermined number of uses.

Aspects of the chat personalization may be implemented by an apparatus and/or by a computer program stored on a computer readable medium. The computer readable medium may comprise a disc, a client device, a host device, and/or a propagated signal. In addition, aspects of the chat personalization may be implemented in a client/host context or in a standalone or offline client device. The chat personalization items may be

rendered in a client/host context and may be accessed or updated through a remote device in a client/host environment. The chat personalization items also may be rendered by the standalone/offline device and may be accessed or updated through a remote device in a non-client/host environment such as, for example, a LAN server serving an end user or a
5 mainframe serving a terminal device.

Other features will be apparent from the following description, including the drawings, and from the claims.

DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

Figs. 1-4 are block diagrams of an exemplary communications system.

10 Figs. 5A, 5B, 16-19, and 21-25 are flow charts of exemplary processes that may be implemented by systems such as those of Figs. 1-4.

Figs. 6-13, 14A, 14B, 15, and 20 are illustrations of different graphical user interfaces that may be implemented by systems such as those of Figs. 1-4 when executing processes such as those of Figs. 5A, 5B, 16-19, and 21-25.

15 For brevity, several elements in the figures described below are represented as monolithic entities. However, as would be understood by one skilled in the art, these elements each may include numerous interconnected computers and components designed to perform a set of specified operations and/or may be dedicated to a particular geographic region.

20 DETAILED DESCRIPTION

A first chat participant may have personalization items that may be sent or otherwise made perceivable to a second chat participant. Personalization items may represent a user or a characteristic of a user, and may include user-selectable binary objects. For example, personalization items include images such as wallpaper that is
25 rendered in a location having a contextual placement on a user interface. The contextual placement typically indicates an association with the user represented by the wallpaper. For example, the wallpaper may be rendered in an area where messages from a particular user represented by the wallpaper are sent or received. In one implementation, wallpaper is a chrome (i.e., border) around a dialog area on a user interface. Personalization items

also include icons such as buddy icons and mini-buddy icons, sounds, animation, video clips, and emoticons (e.g., smileys).

One or more personalization items may be rendered at the first chat participant system and/or at one or more second chat participant systems. first chat participant
5 personalization items are made available to the one or more second chat participant systems ("second chat participant system") by sending one or more identifiers corresponding to the personalization items to the one or more second chat participants ("second chat participant"). An identifier may be associated with a single personalization item, or with a group of two or more personalization items. The second chat participant
10 system uses the identifier to identify the personalization item associated with the sender, and to locate perceivable content corresponding to the identifier. For instance, an identifier received from a sender may be used as a basis for determining if the corresponding personalization item is available locally at the second chat participant system, and, if so, the identifier may be used to retrieve the corresponding personalization
15 item. If the personalization item is not available locally at the second chat participant system, the second chat participant system may use the identifier as a basis for generating one or more requests for the personalization item from another location, such as a chat host system or another remotely-accessible data store such as the first chat participant system, or a remote or third-party server (e.g., a server accessible through the Internet).

20 In another implementation, the chat message from the first chat participant does not contain an identifier, and the second chat participant system retrieves one or more identifiers associated with the personalization items of the first chat participant. For example, the second chat participant system may retrieve the identifiers from a remote location such as a chat host system or another remotely-accessible data store such as
25 those noted above. The identifiers may be stored at the remote location and associated with a screen name or other user identity. The second chat participant system may send a screen name or other user identity to the remote location. The remote location associates the screen name or other user identity with the corresponding identifiers, and sends those identifiers to the second chat participant system. For instance, the chat host may store
30 identifiers associated with the screen name of a first chat participant. The second chat participant system passes the screen name of the first chat participant to the chat host, and

the chat host returns the identifiers associated with that screen name to the second chat participant system. In another implementation, the chat host system or other remotely accessible data store may retrieve and send the personalization items themselves rather than the identifiers.

5 In another example in which the chat message from the first chat participant does not contain an identifier, the second chat participant system may locally store the identifiers in association with a screen name or other user identity. The second chat participant system may then retrieve the locally-stored identifiers based on the screen name or other user identity of the first chat participant. In another implementation, the
10 second chat participant system may retrieve the personalization items themselves rather than the identifiers.

 The identifiers may be retrieved before, during, or after receipt of a chat message from the first chat participant. The identifiers may be stored at the second chat participant system, or at another location such as a chat host system or another remotely-
15 accessible data store such as those noted above. Alternatively, the personalization item itself may be sent by the first chat participant system to the second chat participant system, with a message or through a separate negotiation or communication, and also may be stored locally on the second chat participant system. Upon locating or receiving the personalization item, the second chat participant system renders the item for
20 perception by the second chat participant.

 In yet another implementation, second chat participant personalization items for a destination may be made available to the first chat participant system by selecting one or more identifiers corresponding to the one or more personalization items of the second chat participant. The personalization items may be selected manually by the second chat
25 participant or may be automatically selected for the second chat participant. The identifiers may be associated with a screen name or other identifying information of the second chat participant. For example, the identifiers associated with the screen name of a potential second chat participant may be stored locally at the first chat participant system, or the first chat participant system may retrieve such identifiers from a remotely-
30 accessible data store such as the chat host system, the second chat participant system, or those noted above. The first chat participant system uses the identifier to determine if the

corresponding personalization item is available locally at the first chat participant system, and, if so, the first chat participant system retrieves the corresponding personalization item. If the personalization item is not available locally at the first chat participant system, the first chat participant system requests the personalization item from a
5 remotely-accessible data store, as described above. Alternatively, the personalization item itself may be associated with the second chat participant and retrieved by the first chat participant system. Once the first chat participant system locates or receives the one or more personalization items associated with a destination recipient, the first chat participant system renders the one or more personalization item(s) for perception by the
10 first chat participant. Thus, the personalization items of the second chat participant may be rendered to the first chat participant before correspondence is initiated or communications are established by the recipient and without previously having received a chat message from the second chat participant.

In another implementation, first chat participant personalization items may be
15 made available to the first chat participant system and rendered at the first chat participant system by selecting the identifiers corresponding to the personalization items of the first chat participant. The personalization items may be selected manually by the first chat participant or may be automatically selected for the first chat participant. The identifiers may be associated with a screen name or other identifying information of the
20 first chat participant. For example, the identifiers may be associated with the screen name of the first chat participant and stored locally at the first chat participant system, or the first chat participant system may retrieve the identifiers associated with the screen name of the first chat participant from another location such as the chat host system or another remotely-accessible data store such as those noted above. The first chat
25 participant system uses the identifier to determine if the corresponding personalization item is available locally at the first chat participant system, and if so, the first chat participant system retrieves the corresponding personalization item. If the personalization item is not available locally at the first chat participant system, the first chat participant system requests the personalization item from a remotely-accessible data
30 store, as described above. Alternatively, the personalization item itself may be associated with the first chat participant and retrieved by the first chat participant system.

Once the first chat participant system locates or receives the one or more personalization items associated with a destination recipient, the first chat participant system renders the one or more personalization items for perception by the first chat participant. Thus, the personalization items of the first chat participant may be rendered to the first chat participant similarly to the manner in which the personalization items of the first chat participant are rendered to the second chat participant. Also, the personalization items of the second chat participant may be rendered to the second chat participant in the manner described for rendering the personalization items of the first chat participant to the first chat participant.

A personalization item may be rendered at any time. Typically, a personalization item is rendered upon the occurrence of one or more particular events. For example, a customized sound and/or a personalized icon or wallpaper selected by a first chat participant may be made perceivable to a second chat participant during a chat conversation. In one instance, wallpaper selected by the first chat participant appears on the second chat participant system when a message is received from the first chat participant or when a message is returned to the first chat participant by the second chat participant. As another example, a particular sound is played or an icon is displayed at the second chat participant system when the first chat participant's presence state changes (e.g., when the first chat participant logs on, logs off, becomes inactive, or enables or disables the second chat participant's ability to detect the first chat participant's presence).

Chat personalization items may be rendered for a first chat participant and/or a second chat participant at the first chat participant system, the second chat participant system, or both. The chat personalization items of the first chat participant and the second chat participant may be rendered at the same time or at different times. The same method may be used to render the chat personalization items of the first chat participant and/or the second chat participant at the first chat participant system, the second chat participant system, or both. Alternatively, different methods may be used to render these chat personalization items. In one implementation, a second chat participant may not change the personalization items of a first chat participant, and a first chat participant may not change the personalization items of a second chat participant. A first chat participant may choose to have different personalization items displayed for different

second chat participants, and a second chat participant may choose to have different personalization items displayed for different first chat participants. Once a personalization item is designated by a first chat participant or a second chat participant, the personalization item is typically made available for perception by the second chat participant or the first chat participant automatically. The personalization items may also be selected automatically for a first chat participant or a second chat participant based upon a characteristic of the first chat participant or the second chat participant.

It is possible, through the systems and techniques described herein, to make personalization items perceivable to a first chat participant in a communications interface, when, for example, the first chat participant opens the interface. Personalization items may represent the first chat participant or a characteristic of the first chat participant, and may include user-selectable binary objects. For example, personalization items include images, such as wallpaper, that are rendered in a location having a contextual placement on a user interface. The contextual placement typically indicates an association with the user represented by the wallpaper. For example, the wallpaper may be rendered in an area where messages from the first chat participant are displayed, or as a chrome (i.e., border) around a dialog area on a user interface. Personalization items also include icons such as buddy icons and mini-buddy icons, sounds, animation, video clips, and emoticons (e.g., smileys).

One or more personalization items may be rendered at the first chat participant system. first chat participant personalization items are associated with and made available to the first chat participant system based on one or more identifiers corresponding to the personalization items. An identifier may be associated with a single personalization item, or with a group of two or more personalization items. For instance, an identifier may identify a particular personalization item, a group of personalization items, or a user name or other identifier that may be mapped to one or more personalization items or groups.

The first chat participant system may use the identifier to identify one or more associated personalization items, and to locate perceivable content corresponding to the identifier. For instance, an identifier may be used as a basis for determining if one or more corresponding personalization items are available locally at the first chat participant

system, and, if so, the identifier may be used to retrieve the corresponding personalization item(s). If the personalization items are not available locally at the first chat participant system, the first chat participant system may use the identifier as a basis for generating one or more requests for the personalization item(s) from another location, such as a chat host system or another remotely-accessible data store such as a remote or third-party server (e.g., a server accessible through the Internet).

Identifiers may be retrieved before, during, or after receipt of a chat message from a chat participant (hereinafter "second chat participant"). The first chat participant system may retrieve the identifiers from a remote location such as a chat host system or another remotely-accessible data store such as those noted above. The identifiers may be stored at the remote location and associated with a screen name or other user identity of the first chat participant. The first chat participant system may send a screen name or other user identity to the remote location where it is associated with the corresponding identifiers, and may receive those identifiers from the chat remote location. In another implementation, the chat host system or other remotely accessible data store may retrieve and send the personalization items themselves rather than the identifiers.

Personalization items may be made available to the first chat participant system and rendered at the first chat participant system based on a selection process. The personalization items may be selected manually by the first chat participant or they may be automatically selected for the first chat participant. Identifiers for selected personalization items then may be associated with a screen name or other identifying information for the first chat participant. For example, the identifiers may be associated with the screen name of the first chat participant and stored locally at the first chat participant system, or the first chat participant system may retrieve the identifiers associated with the screen name of the first chat participant from another location such as the chat host system or another remotely-accessible data store such as those noted above.

It is possible, through the systems and techniques described herein, to make personalization items of an intended second chat participant perceivable to a first chat participant in a communications interface of the first chat participant (1) immediately upon opening the interface, (2) before sending a message or other communication to the second chat participant, and/or (3) before receipt of a message or other communication

from the second chat participant. As such, immediately upon opening a communication interface and identifying a potential message recipient, a first chat participant may perceive a personalization item established for or selected by that potential message recipient, which personalization items may not otherwise be made available to the first chat participant until communications are sent or received with respect to that potential message recipient.

Personalization items may represent a user or a characteristic of the intended second chat participant, and may include user-selectable binary objects. For example, personalization items include images, such as wallpaper, that are rendered in a location having a contextual placement on a user interface. The contextual placement typically indicates an association with the user represented by the wallpaper. For example, the wallpaper may be rendered in an area where messages from the second chat participant are to be displayed, or as a chrome (i.e., border) around a dialog area on a user interface. Personalization items also may include icons such as buddy icons and mini-buddy icons, sounds, animation, video clips, and emoticons (e.g., smileys). Personalization items for the intended recipient may be known or unknown to the first chat participant, and they may or may not be stored at the first chat participant system or be otherwise associated with that first chat participant prior to the communication session in which they are displayed using the systems and techniques described herein.

One or more personalization items of an intended second chat participant may be rendered at the first chat participant system. An identifier corresponding to one or more personalization items of the second chat participant is obtained by the first chat participant. For instance, an identifier may identify a particular personalization item, a group of personalization items, or a user name or other identity may be mapped to one or more personalization items or groups.

Identifiers may be retrieved before, during, or after receipt of a chat message or other communication from the second chat participant. For example, the identifiers may be retrieved upon the opening of a communications user interface (UI) by the first chat participant or after opening of the UI but before receipt of a chat message or other communication from the second chat participant.

The first chat participant system may retrieve the identifiers from a remote location such as those noted above. The identifiers may be stored at the remote location and associated with a screen name or other user identity of the second chat participant. The first chat participant system may send the screen name or other user identity of the second chat participant to the remote location where it is then associated with the corresponding identifiers of the second chat participant, and the first chat participant system may receive the corresponding identifiers from the remote location. For instance, the chat host may store identifiers associated with the screen name of a second chat participant. The first chat participant system passes the screen name of the second chat participant to the chat host, and the chat host returns the identifiers associated with the passed screen name to the first chat participant system. In another implementation, a remotely accessible data store may retrieve and send the personalization items themselves to the first chat participant rather than sending the identifiers.

In another example, the first chat participant system may locally store the identifiers in association with a screen name or other user identity of the second chat participant. The first chat participant system may then retrieve the locally-stored identifiers based on the screen name or other user identity of the second chat participant. In another implementation, the first chat participant system may retrieve the personalization items themselves rather than the identifiers.

Personalization items may be made available to the first chat participant system based on a selecting process. The personalization items to be made perceivable to the first chat participant may be selected manually by the second chat participant or may be automatically selected for the second chat participant. Identifiers for selected personalization items may be associated with a screen name or other identifying information for the second chat participant. For example, the identifiers associated with the screen name of a potential second chat participant may be stored locally at the first chat participant system, or the first chat participant system may retrieve such identifiers from a remotely-accessible data store such as the chat host system, the second chat participant system, or those noted above.

Personalization items of the second chat participant may be rendered to the first chat participant before correspondence is initiated or communications are established by

the recipient and without previously having received a chat message from the second chat participant. Once the first chat participant system locates or receives the one or more personalization items associated with a intended destination recipient, the first chat participant system renders the one or more personalization items for perception by the first chat participant. Also, the personalization items of the first chat participant may be rendered to the second chat participant in the manner described for rendering the personalization items of the second chat participant to the first chat participant.

Typically, a personalization item is rendered upon the occurrence of one or more particular events. For example, a customized sound and/or a personalized icon or wallpaper selected by a second chat participant may be made perceivable to a first chat participant when the first chat participant initiates a chat communications session with the second chat participant by, for example, opening a chat communications window. As an example, a particular sound may be played or an icon may be displayed at the first chat participant system when changes are experienced in presence or state of the second chat participant with whom they communicate changes (e.g., when the second chat participant or other chat participant logs on, logs off, becomes inactive, or enables or disables the first chat participant's ability to detect the second chat participant's presence).

In one implementation, the first chat participant may not change the personalization items of a second chat participant. A second chat participant may choose to have different personalization items displayed for different first chat participants. Once a personalization item is designated by a second chat participant, the personalization item is typically made available for perception by the first chat participant automatically. The personalization items may also be selected automatically for a second chat participant based upon a characteristic of the first chat participant.

Personalization item associated with or selected by a sending party (sender) may be rendered by a receiving party (recipient) in an area associated with messages received from the sender, for instance, as a chrome (i.e., border) around a dialog area on a user interface. Such personalization item may be sent or otherwise communicated by the sender to the recipient.

Moreover, personalization item selected by the sender may be made available to a recipient by embedding and sending the personalization item to the recipient in a message

sent by the sender such as a chat message, or sending them with or in association with such a message. The personalization item may be sent by the sender system to the recipient system, with a message or through a separate negotiation or communication, and also may be stored locally on the recipient system.

5 In one implementation, the sender's personalization item may be contained in a chat message from the sender to the recipient, or in a computer-to-computer message, not under control of the sender or the recipient, from sender system to recipient system. In another implementation, a portion of the item is included in a message, and the item is progressively rendered to the recipient with the receipt of each successive message. In
10 yet another implementation, a portion of the item is included in the message, and the recipient system waits over the course of one or more successive messages for the receipt of entire item before rendering the item. In this sense, a first communication by the sender may trigger a series of successive communications of the personalization item or portions of the personalization item to enable an iterative communication of that
15 personalization item that may occur in the background and without delaying receipt of the sender's original message and without delaying rendering of the personalization item pending further overt communication between the sender and the recipient.

 Upon receipt of the personalization item, the second chat participant system renders the personalization item for perception by the second chat participant.

20 Although personalization item may be rendered at any time, personalization item typically is rendered upon the occurrence of one or more particular events. For example, personalization item selected by a first chat participant may be made perceivable to a second chat participant during a chat conversation. In one instance, personalization item selected by the first chat participant appears on the second chat participant system when a
25 message is received from the first chat participant or when a message is returned to the first chat participant by the second chat participant. As another example, the personalization item may be displayed by the second chat participant system when changes are experienced in presence or state of the first chat participant or other chat participant with whom they communicate (e.g., when the first chat participant or other
30 chat participant logs on, logs off, becomes inactive, or enables or disables the second chat participant's ability to detect the first chat participant's presence).

Personalization item may be rendered for a first chat participant and/or a second chat participant at the first chat participant system, the second chat participant system, or both. The chat personalization item of the first chat participant and the second chat participant may be rendered at the same time or at different times. Personalization item
5 of the second chat participant may be rendered at the first chat participant system in a manner similar to that used to render personalization item of the first chat participant at the second chat participant system.

A first chat participant may choose to have different personalization item displayed for different second chat participants, and a second chat participant may choose
10 to have different personalization item displayed for different first chat participants. Once a personalization item is designated by a first chat participant or a second chat participant, the personalization item typically is made available for perception by the second chat participant or the first chat participant automatically. The personalization item also may be selected automatically for a first chat participant or a second chat
15 participant based upon a characteristic of the first chat participant or the second chat participant.

In one implementation, a second chat participant may not change the personalization item of a first chat participant, and a first chat participant may not change the personalization item of a second chat participant.

20 Chat personalization items may be rendered by any type of hardware, software, device, computer, computer system, equipment, component, program, application, code, storage medium, or propagated signal. In one implementation, the chat personalization items may be rendered in a client/host context, and the chat personalization items may be accessed or updated through a remote device in a client/host environment. In another
25 implementation, the chat personalization items may be implemented in a standalone or offline client context. The chat personalization items may be rendered by the standalone/offline device and may be accessed or updated through a remote device in a non-client/host environment such as, for example, a LAN (Local Area Network) server serving an end user or a mainframe serving a terminal device.

30 Typically, chat communications involve an instantaneous or nearly instantaneous communication between two or more users, where each user is able to transmit, receive

and display communicated information. Additionally, chat communications may involve the display and perception of online presence information regarding other users present in the chat room. However, chat communications may occur in the absence of online presence information. The chat communications may be machine-to-machine

5 communications that occur without intervention by or communication through a chat server after a communication session is established or authentication is performed. Examples of chat communications exist over AOL (America Online), Yahoo, and MSN, among others. Although discussed below primarily with respect to chat applications, other implementations are contemplated for providing similar functionality in platforms

10 and online applications such as instant messaging (IM), e-mail, and streaming media applications.

For illustrative purposes, Figs. 1 and 2 show an example of a communications system for implementing techniques for transferring electronic data. For brevity, several elements in the figures described below are represented as monolithic entities. However,

15 as would be understood by one skilled in the art, these elements each may include numerous interconnected computers and components designed to perform a set of specified operations and/or may be dedicated to a particular geographic region.

Referring to Fig. 1, a communications system 100 is capable of delivering and exchanging data between a first chat participant system 105 and a host system 110

20 through a communications link 115. The first chat participant system 105 typically includes one or more client devices 120 and/or client controllers 125, and the host system 110 typically includes one or more host devices 135 and/or host controllers 140. For example, the first chat participant system 105 or the host system 110 may include one or more general-purpose computers (e.g., personal computers), one or more special-purpose

25 computers (e.g., devices specifically programmed to communicate with each other and/or the first chat participant system 105 or the host system 110), or a combination of one or more general-purpose computers and one or more special-purpose computers. The first chat participant system 105 and the host system 110 may be arranged to operate within or in concert with one or more other systems, such as, for example, one or more LANs

30 ("Local Area Networks") and/or one or more WANs ("Wide Area Networks").

The client device 120 and the host device 135 are generally capable of executing instructions under the command of, respectively, a client controller 125 and a host controller 140. The client device 120 and the host device 135 are connected to, respectively, the client controller 125 and the host controller 140 by, respectively, wired
5 or wireless data pathways 130 and 145, which are capable of delivering data.

The client device 120, the client controller 125, the host device 135, and the host controller 140 typically each include one or more hardware components and/or software components. An example of a client device 120 or a host device 135 is a general-purpose computer (e.g., a personal computer) or software on such a computer capable of
10 responding to and executing instructions in a defined manner. Other examples include a special-purpose computer, a workstation, a server, a device, a component, other physical or virtual equipment or some combination of these capable of responding to and executing instructions. The client device 120 and the host device 135 may include devices that are capable of establishing peer-to-peer communications.

An example of client controller 125 or host controller 140 is a software application loaded on the client device 120 or the host device 135 for commanding and directing communications enabled by the client device 120 or the host device 135. Other examples include a program, a piece of code, an instruction, a device, a computer, a computer system, or a combination of these for independently or collectively instructing
20 the client device 120 or the host device 135 to interact and operate as described. The client controller 125 and the host controller 140 may be embodied permanently or temporarily in any type of machine, component, physical or virtual equipment, storage medium, or propagated signal capable of providing instructions to the client device 120 and the host device 135.

The communications link 115 typically includes a delivery network 160 that provides direct or indirect communication between the first chat participant system 105 and the host system 110, irrespective of physical separation. Examples of a delivery network 160 include the Internet, the World Wide Web, WANs, LANs, analog or digital wired and wireless telephone networks (e.g., Public Switched Telephone Network
30 (PSTN), Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN), and Digital Subscriber Line (xDSL)), radio, television, cable, or satellite systems, and other delivery mechanisms for

carrying data. The communications link 115 may include communication pathways 150 and 155 that enable communications through the one or more delivery networks 160 described above. Each of the communication pathways 150 and 155 may include, for example, a wired, wireless, cable or satellite communication pathway.

5 Fig. 2 illustrates a communications system 200 including a first chat participant system 105 communicating with a host system 110 through a communications link 115.

 The first chat participant system 105 includes a client device 120 that typically includes a general-purpose computer 270 having an internal or external memory 272 for storing data and programs such as an operating system 274 (e.g., DOS, Windows™, Windows 95™, Windows 98™, Windows 2000™, Windows Me™, Windows XP™, Windows NT™, OS/2, or Linux) and one or more application programs. Examples of application programs include authoring applications 276 (e.g., word processing programs, database programs, spreadsheet programs, or graphics programs) capable of generating documents or other electronic content; client applications 278 (e.g., America Online (AOL) client, CompuServe client, AOL Instant Messenger (AIM) client, interactive television (ITV) client, Internet Service Provider (ISP) client, chat client or instant messaging (IM) client) capable of communicating with other computer users, accessing various computer resources, and viewing, creating, or otherwise manipulating electronic content; and browser applications 280 (e.g., Netscape's Navigator or Microsoft's Internet Explorer) capable of rendering standard Internet content and other content formatted according to standard protocols such as the Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP).

 One or more of the application programs may be installed on the internal or external storage 272 of the general-purpose computer 270. Alternatively, in another implementation, the client controller 125 may access application programs externally stored in and/or performed by one or more device(s) external to the general-purpose computer 270.

 The general-purpose computer 270 also includes a central processing unit 282 (CPU) for executing instructions in response to commands from the client controller 125, and a communication device 284 for sending and receiving data. One example of the communication device 284 is a modem. Other examples include a transceiver, a set-top box, a communication card, a satellite dish, an antenna, a network adapter, or some other

mechanism capable of transmitting and receiving data over the communications link 115 through a wired or wireless data pathway 150. The general-purpose computer 270 optionally includes a television ("TV") tuner 286 for receiving television programming in the form of broadcast, satellite, and/or cable TV signals. The TV tuner 286 permits the client device 120 to selectively and/or simultaneously display network content received by communications device 284 and TV programming content received by the TV tuner 286.

The general-purpose computer 270 may include an input/output interface 288 that enables wired or wireless connection to various peripheral devices 290. Examples of peripheral devices 290 include, but are not limited to, a mouse 291, a mobile phone 292, a personal digital assistant (PDA) 293, an MP3 player (not shown), a keyboard 294, a display monitor 295 with or without a touch screen input, a TV remote control 296 for receiving information from and rendering information to users, and an audiovisual input device 298.

Although Fig. 2 illustrates devices such as a mobile telephone 292, a PDA 293, and a TV remote control 296 as being peripheral with respect to the general-purpose computer 270, in another implementation, such devices may themselves include the functionality of the general-purpose computer 270 and operate as the client device 120. For example, the mobile phone 292 or the PDA 293 may include computing and networking capabilities and function as a client device 120 by accessing the delivery network 160 and communicating with the host system 110. Furthermore, the first chat participant system 105 may include one, some or all of the components and devices described above.

Fig. 3 illustrates a communications system 300 that supports a chat service including a first chat participant system 105 communicating with one or more other chat participant systems 305, 306, 307 and a chat host system 310 through a communication link 115. Chat system users may be distributed geographically and communicate with the chat host system 310 using chat participant systems such as second chat participant system 305, third chat participant system 306, or fourth chat participant system 307. Second chat participant system 305 runs chat client software that communicates with a corresponding chat host software on chat host system 310, by way of a browser or

otherwise. Chat host system 310 coordinates chat sessions by receiving the textual, or other, input sent from a first chat participant system 105 or a second chat participant system 305 and replicating that input to other systems such as a second chat participant system 305 or first chat participant system 105, as appropriate. Such a communications
5 system may be used by users of chat service providers, such as, for example, AOL, Yahoo, and MSN.

In one implementation, the chat host system 310 may have characteristics similar to those described above with respect to the host system 110, the second chat participant system 305 may have characteristics similar to those described above with respect to the
10 first chat participant system 105, and the first chat participant system 105 and the second chat participant system 305 may include communication software to enable users of the client systems to access the chat host system 310.

The chat host system 310 may support chat services irrespective of a first chat participant's network or Internet access. Thus, the chat host system 310 may allow users
15 to send and receive messages, regardless of whether they have access to any particular ISP. The chat host system 310 also may support associated services, such as administrative matters, advertising, directory services, chat, and interest groups related to the chat. The chat host system 310 has an architecture that enables the devices (e.g., servers) within the chat host system 310 to communicate with each other. To transfer
20 data, the chat host system 310 employs one or more standard or exclusive chat protocols.

To access the chat host system 310 to begin a chat session in the implementation of Fig. 3, the first chat participant system 105 establishes a connection to the chat host system 310. Once a connection to the chat host system 310 has been established, the first chat participant system 105 may directly or indirectly transmit data to and access content
25 from the chat host system 310. By accessing the chat host system, a first chat participant can use the chat client application to view which other users ("people here list") are online in the chat room, exchange messages with the other users in the chat room. The user also may be supplied with other capabilities, such as the ability to trade files such as pictures, invitations or documents, find other users with similar interests, get
30 customized information such as news and stock quotes, and search the Web. second chat

participant system 305 may be similarly manipulated to establish contemporaneous connection with chat host system 310.

Once connectivity is established, a first chat participant who is using first chat participant system 105 may view whether a second chat participant using second chat participant system 305 is online, and typically may view whether the second chat participant is able to receive messages. If the second chat participant is online, the first chat participant may exchange messages with the second chat participant.

In one implementation, the messages sent between first chat participant system 105 and second chat participant system 305 are routed through chat host system 310. In another implementation, the messages sent between first chat participant system 105 and second chat participant system 305 are routed through a third party server (not shown), and, in some cases, are also routed through chat host system 310. In yet another implementation, the messages are sent directly between first chat participant system 105 and second chat participant system 305.

In one implementation, personalization items may be leveraged from an instant messaging host 315 or an instant messaging client 302 by a chat participant, such as first chat participant 105. The personalization items may be accessed, stored, retrieved, edited, or otherwise manipulated from a data repository designated for an instant messaging system. For example, the personalization items may be stored in a data storage 320. Data storage 320 may be located in a host system such as the IM host 315, the chat host 310, or a different host system such as a host system accessible through the Internet. The data storage may also be located in a chat sender system such as first chat participant system 105, second chat participant system 305, third chat participant system 306, or fourth chat participant system 307, and may be accessible through a client such as an instant messaging client 302 or a chat client.

IM profiles for particular users may be stored in a data repository, which may be the same data repository or a different data repository than the data repository used to store the personalization items. The data repository storing the IM profiles may be used to determine how to personalize the chat environment.

As discussed below with respect to Figs. 14A and 14B, a mapping may be made between the chat personalization items, opportunities, and settings and IM

personalization items, opportunities, and settings. The mapping enables something defined in IM for a particular context encountered in IM to be used for a different context in chat, or vice versa. For example, presence in IM may be defined as the use of the IM application by a user, whereas presence in chat may be defined as participation in a chat room. Therefore, the IM personalization item, such as a sound of a door opening, for becoming present in the IM context may be applied to chat. However, the application in chat for becoming present is not beginning to use the chat application by the user, but instead for entry into one of several chat rooms. The mapping may be modified, for example, by the user or by a system administrator.

In one implementation, different sets of personalization items may be used for different chat rooms, as appropriate. For example, the first chat participant may designate a set of personalization items to be used in a sports chat room and a different set of personalization items to be used when participating in an arts and entertainment chat room. These sets of personalization items may be stored in a data store, such as data store 320 so as to be associated with the particular chat participant and the particular chat room context where they are to be used.

Fig. 4 illustrates a communications system 400 including a first chat participant system 105 communicating with a second chat participant system 305 and a chat host system 310 through a communication link 115. System 400 illustrates a possible implementation of the communications system 300 of Fig. 3.

In system 400, the chat host system 310 includes a login server 470 for enabling access by users and routing communications between the first chat participant system 105 and other elements of the chat host system 310. The chat host system 310 also includes a chat server 490. To enable access to and facilitate interactions with the chat host system 310, the first chat participant system 105 and the second chat participant system 305 may include communication software, such as for example, an OSP client application and/or a chat client application.

As described with respect to Fig. 3, the chat host system 310 may support chat services irrespective of a first chat participant's network or Internet access. Thus, the chat host system 310 may allow users to send and receive messages, regardless of whether they have access to any particular ISP. The chat host system 310 also may support

associated services, such as administrative matters, advertising, directory services, chat, and interest groups related to the chat. The chat host system 310 has an architecture that enables the devices (e.g., servers) within the chat host system 310 to communicate with each other. To transfer data, the chat host system 310 employs one or more standard or
5 exclusive chat protocols.

In one implementation, the first chat participant system 105 establishes a connection to the login server 470 in order to access the chat host system 310 and begin a chat session. The login server 470 typically determines whether the particular first chat participant is authorized to access the chat host system 310 by verifying the first chat
10 participant's identification and password. If the first chat participant is authorized to access the chat host system 310, the login server 470 usually employs a hashing technique on the first chat participant's screen name to identify a particular chat server 490 within the chat host system 310 for use during the first chat participant's session. The login server 470 provides the first chat participant (e.g., first chat participant system
15 105) with the IP address of the chat server 490, gives the first chat participant system 105 an encrypted key, and breaks the connection. The first chat participant system 105 then uses the IP address to establish a connection to the particular chat server 490 through the communications link 115, and obtains access to the chat server 490 using the encrypted key. Typically, the first chat participant system 105 will be able to establish an open TCP
20 connection to the chat server 490. The second chat participant system 305 establishes a connection to the chat host system 310 in a similar manner.

In one implementation, the first chat participant system 105 may directly or indirectly transmit data to and access content from the chat server 490 once a connection to the chat server 490 has been established. By accessing the chat server, a first chat
25 participant can leverage the chat client application to determine whether particular users ("buddies" or potential second chat participants) are online, exchange messages with particular buddies, participate in group chat rooms, trade files such as pictures, invitations or documents, find other buddies with similar interests, get customized news and stock quotes, and search the Web. For example a first chat participant who is using first chat
30 participant system 105 may view whether a buddy using second chat participant system 305 is online, and if so, may exchange messages with that buddy. In one implementation,

the messages sent between first chat participant system 105 and second chat participant system 305 are routed through chat host system 310. In another implementation, the messages sent between first chat participant system 105 and second chat participant system 305 are routed through a third party server (not shown) and, in some cases, are also routed through chat host system 310. In yet another implementation, the messages are sent directly between first chat participant system 105 and second chat participant system 305.

In one implementation, the chat host system 310 also includes a chat user profile server (not shown) connected to a database (not shown) for storing large amounts of user profile data. The user profile server may be used to enter, retrieve, edit, manipulate, or otherwise process user profile data. In one implementation, a first chat participant's profile data includes, for example, the first chat participant's screen name, instant messaging buddy list, identified interests, and geographic location. The first chat participant's profile may also include personalization items selected by the first chat participant. The first chat participant may enter, edit and/or delete profile data using an installed chat client application on the first chat participant system 105 to interact with the user profile server.

In another implementation, the chat host system 310 also includes a user profile server (not shown) connected to a database (not shown) for storing large amounts of user profile data. The user profile server may be used to enter, retrieve, edit, manipulate, or otherwise process user profile data. In one implementation, a second chat participant's profile data includes, for example, the second chat participant's screen name, instant messaging buddy list, identified interests, and geographic location. The second chat participant may enter, edit and/or delete profile data using an installed chat client application on the second chat participant system 305 to interact with the user profile server.

Because the first chat participant's data are stored in the chat host system 310, the first chat participant does not have to reenter or update such information in the event that the first chat participant accesses the chat host system 310 using a new or different first chat participant system 105. Accordingly, when a first chat participant accesses the chat host system 310, the chat server can instruct the user profile server to retrieve the first

chat participant's profile data from the database and to provide profile data to the chat server. Alternatively, user profile data may be saved locally on the first chat participant system 105.

Referring to Figs. 5A and 5B, the first chat participant system 105, the second
5 chat participant system 305, and the chat host system 310 interact according to exemplary procedures 500A and 500B to make a personalization item selected by the first chat participant perceivable to the second chat participant during a chat communications session. The procedures 500A and 500B may be implemented by various types of hardware, software, device, computer, computer system, equipment, component,
10 program, application, code, storage medium, or propagated signal. Furthermore, although not shown in Figs. 5A and 5B, the first chat participant system 105, the second chat participant system 305, and the chat host system 310 may be directly or indirectly interconnected through known or described delivery networks, examples of which are described with respect to network 160. The procedures 500A and 500B may be
15 implemented in a client/host context, or a standalone or offline client context. The personalization item may be rendered by the standalone/offline device and may be accessed or updated through a remote device in a non-client/host environment such as, for example, a LAN server serving an end user or a mainframe serving a terminal device. Thus, the procedures 500A and 500B described below may be implemented for any OSP,
20 ISP, browser and/or other software program having a graphical user interface, such as programs for chat, instant messaging, electronic mail and stand-alone browsers.

Procedures 500A and 500B generally involve transporting and rendering a personalization item. While some functions of procedures 500A and 500B may be performed entirely by the first chat participant system 105 or the second chat participant
25 system 305, other functions may be performed by the collective operation of the first chat participant system 105, the second chat participant system 305, and the chat host system 310. For example, a personalization item may be rendered entirely by the first chat participant system 105. However, the UI may be rendered based upon information and/or chat messages provided to the second chat participant system 305 by the chat host system
30 310.

Referring to Fig. 5A, in the procedure 500A, the first chat participant system 105 and the chat host system 310 are physically and/or logically connected (step 505). For instance, first chat participant system 105 may connect to the chat host system 310 across a network (e.g., network 160) by supplying a first chat participant identification and
5 password to a server (e.g., a login server) in order to obtain access to the chat host system 310.

Next, the presence state in the chat room or presence state change in the chat room of the first chat participant system 105, e.g., login state, is detected by the chat host system 310 (step 508). The chat host system 310 may detect other presence states or state
10 changes, such as, for example, when the first chat participant signs out, is inactive for a period of time, becomes active after having been inactive for a period of time, indicates an ability to receive chat messages, or indicates an inability to receive chat messages. Presence in a chat context typically is defined by the entry of the chat participant into a chat room.

15 Next, the personalization item identifiers are identified for the first chat participant (step 509). Identifying the personalization item identifiers may include leveraging IM personalization items of the first chat participant, for example, as described above with respect to Fig. 3. In one implementation, the personalization items themselves may be identified for the first chat participant.

20 The identifiers corresponding to the personalization items to be projected by the first chat participant may be chosen on behalf of the first chat participant system by others, or may be presented to the first chat participant to depict the status or attributes of others. The identifier may be chosen to override or supplement a selection of personalization items to be projected by others, or may be chosen as a default in the
25 absence of a selection by others.

After detecting the presence state change of the first chat participant system 105, the chat host system 310 may send or otherwise make accessible to other chat systems a notification of the first chat participant presence state change to other chat systems (step 514). Sending notification of the presence state change may include sending an identifier
30 corresponding to a personalization item selected by the first chat participant system 105.

For example, the chat host system 310 may send an identifier corresponding to a sound chosen by the first chat participant system 105 for the presence state change.

In one implementation, the chat host system 310 assigns an identifier to the personalization item. In another implementation, the system sending the personalization
5 item assigns the identifier to the personalization item.

The identifier typically includes information allowing the corresponding personalization item to be located and retrieved. For example, the identifier may include a location of the personalization item. The identifier also may include a type identifier that identifies the personalization item as, for example, an icon, a chat wallpaper, an
10 emoticon, or a sound. The type identifier also may include a file format of the personalization item. Also, the identifier may include one or more flags to indicate, for example, if the personalization item is a custom item or an "official" item, has been banned, or has expired. Another flag may redirect the recipient to a different personalization item. The identifier may further include information concerning the size
15 of the personalization item. The identifier may be in a predetermined format and may be of a predetermined length.

The second chat participant system 305 receives the notification from the chat host system 310 (step 516). In the above example, receiving the notification may include receiving an identifier corresponding to a personalization item selected by the first chat
20 participant system 105. In another implementation, the notification may be received without an identifier. In another implementation, only the identifier itself may be received, and the identifier may serve as both notification and identifier.

Next, the second chat participant system 305 determines whether the corresponding personalization item is locally available (step 518). For example, the
25 second chat participant system 305 may have stored the personalization in a local memory or another local storage location. The second chat participant system uses the identifier to determine whether the corresponding personalization item is locally available. For instance, the identifier may contain the location at which the corresponding personalization item is stored.

If the corresponding personalization item is available locally, the second chat participant system retrieves the corresponding personalization item (step 520) and renders the personalization item (step 530).

5 Otherwise, if the corresponding personalization item is not available locally, the second chat participant system 305 requests the corresponding personalization item from the chat host system 310 or a location otherwise specified by or inferred from the identifier (step 522). That is, the second chat participant system 305 may request the corresponding personalization item from another location such as the first chat participant system 105 or a remote, third party server. Requesting the corresponding personalization
10 item may include sending the identifier associated with the personalization item to the chat host system 310 along with a request to download the personalization item to the second chat participant system 305.

When the chat host system 310 receives the request for a personalization item from the second chat participant system (step 524), and the personalization item is
15 available, the chat host system 310 provides the corresponding personalization item to the second chat participant system (step 526). Receiving the request may include having the chat host system 310 receive the identifier associated with the personalization item along with a request to download the personalization item to the second chat participant system 305.

20 Next, the corresponding personalization item is received by the second chat participant system (step 528), which may save the personalization item in a memory or other storage at the local second chat participant system 305. Then, the personalization item is rendered (step 530). For example, as discussed below with respect to Fig. 10, the personalization items may include personalization items for a chat participant list 1005.

25 Referring to Fig. 5B, in procedure 500B, after the first chat participant system 105 connects to the chat host system 310 (step 505), the chat host system 310 optionally may provide the first chat participant system 105 with a personalization item update or notification (step 510), which generally is responsive or related to the detected state of the first chat participant system 105. For example, if personalization items corresponding
30 to certain identifiers have changed or expired, the updated personalization item may be

transmitted to the first chat participant system 105. The update may be automatic or may be requested by the first chat participant system 105.

The first chat participant system 105 may receive the personalization item update or notification when first accessing chat host system 310 (step 512), or at a later time, assuming that updates exist. Updates received by first chat participant system 105 may be stored locally at the first chat participant system 105.

Based on personalization updates received (optional steps 510 and 512) and other personalization items available, a personalization item is selected at the first chat participant system 105 (step 532). As discussed below with respect to Figs. 6-10, the selection may be made with the assistance of first chat participant interfaces 600, 700, 800, 900, and 1000, and the first chat participant may make the selection using a mouse or other input device. The selection may be made in a non-chat environment, and the user may not be aware of the application of the selected personalization items in chat. For example, the selection may be made in an IM application environment, and the IM personalization items may be leveraged by the chat system.

The personalization items may be selected manually by the first chat participant or may be automatically selected for the first chat participant. The first chat participant personalization items may be made available to the first chat participant system and rendered at the first chat participant system by selecting the identifiers corresponding to the personalization items of the first chat participant. The identifiers may be associated with a screen name or other identifying information of the first chat participant. For example, the identifiers may be associated with the screen name of the first chat participant and stored locally at the first chat participant system, or the first chat participant system may retrieve the identifiers associated with the screen name of the first chat participant from another location, such as the chat host system or another remotely-accessible data store.

The first chat participant system uses the identifier to determine if the corresponding personalization item is available locally at the first chat participant system, and if so, the first chat participant system retrieves the corresponding personalization item. If the personalization item is not available locally at the first chat participant system, the first chat participant system requests the personalization item from another

location such as a chat host system or another remotely-accessible data store..

Alternatively, the personalization item itself may be associated with the first chat participant and retrieved by the first chat participant system. Once the first chat participant system locates or receives the personalization item, the first chat participant system renders the item for perception by the first chat participant.

Thereafter, a chat message is generated by the first chat participant system 105 to be sent to the second chat participant system 305 (step 534). In one implementation, the first chat participant may generate the chat message by manipulating a UI, such as the UI 1000 shown in Fig. 10. The UI 10500 may include personalization items of the second chat participant, such as a buddy icon of the second chat participant.

To make the personalization items of the second chat participant available to the first chat participant in UI 1000, the first chat participant system 105 selects the identifiers corresponding to the personalization items of the second chat participant. The identifiers may be associated with a screen name or other identifying information of the second chat participant. For example, the identifiers may be associated with the screen name of the second chat participant and stored locally at the first chat participant system 105, or the first chat participant system may retrieve the identifiers associated with the screen name of the second chat participant from a remotely-accessible data store such as the chat host system 310, the second chat participant system 305, or a remote or third-party server. As such, personalization items of the second chat participant may be made available to the first chat participant before the receipt by the first chat participant of a chat from the second chat participant.

The first chat participant system 105 uses the identifiers to identify the personalization item associated with the recipient, and to locate perceivable content corresponding to the identifier. For instance, an identifier received from a recipient may be used as a basis for determining if the corresponding personalization items are available locally at the first chat participant system, and if so, may be used to retrieve the corresponding personalization items. If the personalization items are not available locally at the first chat participant system 105, the first chat participant system may use the identifiers as a basis for generating one or more requests for the personalization items from another location such as the chat host system 310 or another remotely-accessible

data store, such as the second chat participant system 305 or a remote or third-party server. Once the first chat participant system 105 locates or receives the personalization items, that system renders the items for perception by the first chat participant.

5 Next, the first chat participant system 105 transmits the chat message along with an identifier corresponding to each personalization item to the chat host system 310 (step 536). The first chat participant may manipulate a user interface to render a chat user interface. The first chat participant may select the screen name of the second chat participant system, cause the chat UI to be rendered, and type the message in a chat compose area to generate the chat. The first chat participant system 105 includes one or
10 more personalization items to be transported in the chat message. The chat message may be transmitted, for example, by selecting a send control.

 The chat host system 310 receives the chat message and the identifier (step 538). The chat host system 310 then may authenticate the chat message for security purposes (step 540)

15 The chat host system 310 determines whether the corresponding personalization item is stored at the chat host 310 (step 542). The chat host system 310 may have stored the personalization on a server 390 or in a local memory or other local storage location. The chat host system 310 uses the identifier in determining whether the corresponding personalization is available locally. For instance, the identifier may contain the location
20 at which the corresponding personalization item is stored. If the corresponding personalization item is available locally at the chat host system 310, a format check may be performed on the personalization item (step 552) and the personalization item may be made available to the second chat participant system 305 (step 554).

 Otherwise, if the corresponding personalization item is not available at the chat
25 host system 310, the chat host system 310 may request the corresponding personalization item from the first chat participant system (step 544). Alternatively, the chat host system 310 may request the corresponding personalization item from another location, such as the second chat participant system 305 or a remote, third party server. Requesting the corresponding personalization item may include sending the identifier associated with the
30 personalization item to the first chat participant system 105 along with a request to download the personalization item to the chat host system 310.

The first chat participant system 105 receives the request for the personalization item from the chat host system (step 546). Receiving the request may include receiving the identifier associated with the personalization item along with a request to download the personalization item to the chat host system 310.

5 The first chat participant system 105 provides the corresponding personalization item to the second chat participant system (step 548). The personalization item provided by the first chat participant system may include a user-customized personalization item.

10 The corresponding personalization item is received by the chat host system 310 and the personalization item and/or the associated identifier are stored (step 550). Storing the personalization item and/or the identifier may include saving the personalization item and/or the identifier in a memory or other storage at the chat host system 310.

A format check may be performed on the personalization item (step 552). The format check may include comparing the actual format of the personalization item to the expected format of the personalization item based upon the identifier.

15 The chat host system 310 sends the chat message and the identifier corresponding to the selected personalization item to the second chat participant system 305 (step 554). Because various aspects of steps 554-570 are similar to those discussed above with respect to steps 514-530 of procedure 500A, the following discussion of steps 554-570 is somewhat abbreviated.

20 In one implementation, the chat host system 310 assigns an identifier to the personalization item. In another implementation, the client system sending the personalization item assigns the identifier to the personalization item.

25 The second chat participant system 305 receives the notification from the chat host system 310 (step 556). Receiving the notification includes receiving an identifier corresponding to the personalization item selected by the first chat participant system 105, as discussed above with respect to step 516.

30 Next, the second chat participant system 305 determines whether the corresponding personalization item is available locally (step 558). As discussed above with respect to step 518, the second chat participant system 305 may have stored the personalization in a local memory or other local storage location. The second chat participant system 305 uses the identifier to determine whether the corresponding

personalization is available locally. For instance, the identifier may contain the location at which the corresponding personalization item is stored. Such a determination may include determining whether the corresponding personalization items are available through IM, and/or determining whether the corresponding personalization items are available through chat. For example, a determination may be made as to whether the corresponding personalization items are available through an IM client or a chat client.

If the corresponding personalization item is available locally, the second chat participant system 305 retrieves the corresponding personalization item (step 560) and the personalization item is rendered (step 570).

Otherwise, if the corresponding personalization item is not available locally, the second chat participant system 305 requests the corresponding personalization item from the chat host system 310 (step 562). Alternatively, as discussed above with respect to step 522, the second chat participant system 305 may request the corresponding personalization item from another location, such as the first chat participant system 105 or a remote, third party server. In one implementation, the personalization item may be provided by a third party, and may be made available in consideration of a payment by the first chat participant or the second chat participant. Requesting the corresponding personalization item may include sending to the chat host system 310 the identifier associated with the personalization item along with a request to download the personalization item to the second chat participant system 305.

The chat host system 310 receives the request for the personalization item from the second chat participant system 305 (step 564). As discussed above with respect to step 524, receiving the request may include receiving the identifier associated with the personalization item along with a request to download the personalization item to the second chat participant system 305. The chat host system 310 provides the corresponding personalization item to the second chat participant system 305 (step 566).

The corresponding personalization item is received by the second chat participant system 305 (step 568). As discussed above with respect to step 528, receiving the corresponding personalization item may include saving the personalization item in a memory or other storage at the local second chat participant system 305.

Finally, the personalization item is rendered (step 570). As discussed below with respect to Fig. 10, the personalization item to be rendered may include a buddy icon.

The relative order of steps 505-530 with respect to other steps in procedure 500A, and the relative order of steps 505-570 with respect to other steps in procedure 500B, and also with respect to each other, may vary. For example, a personalization update (step 510 of Fig. 5B) may be performed during, after, or simultaneously with sending notification of a first chat participant presence state change (step 514 of Fig. 5A). Also, certain steps may be omitted entirely, as appropriate. For example, referring to Fig. 5A, if the first chat participant has not chosen a personalization item to be sent to the second chat participant system 305 upon a presence state change, then no such item will be sent and steps 516-530 may be eliminated entirely. In another example, referring to Fig. 5B, steps 540-552 may be eliminated such that, after receiving the chat with the identifier from the first chat participant system, the host next sends the chat with the identifier to the second chat participant system.

Fig. 6 illustrates one example of a first chat participant UI 600 for enabling a first chat participant to select personalization items (e.g., at step 532). The UI 600 may be presented to a first chat participant of a chat service provider. In general, the UI 600 is rendered on the first chat participant system 105 using software stored on the first chat participant system 105. The personalization items to be selected by the first chat participant may be stored on the first chat participant system 105, on the chat host system 310, or on a different host system 110 such as a host system of an authorized partner.

The UI 600 includes menu tabs 605, 635 and 640 that each have a corresponding menu to assist the first chat participant with selecting personalization items. For example, as shown in Fig. 6, the menu 605a corresponding to menu tab 605 enables a first chat participant to make selections of personalization items including buddy icons 610, chat wallpaper 615, and smiley (i.e., emoticon) themes 620. The first chat participant's current selections of buddy icon 610a₁, mini buddy icon 610a₂, chat wallpaper 615a, and smiley theme 620a are displayed. Each of these personalization items may be made available to and rendered by a second chat participant during a chat conversation with the first chat participant.

A control 610b is provided for the first chat participant to select a large buddy icon 610a₁ and/or a mini-buddy icon 610a₂, and a control 610c is provided to enable reset of the buddy icon selections back to a default setting (e.g., none). Another control 615b is provided to enable selection of chat wallpaper 615a, and a control 615c is provided to enable reset of the chat wallpaper selection back to a default setting. Yet another control 620b is provided to enable a smiley theme 620a, and a control 620c is provided for the first chat participant to reset the smiley theme selection back to a default setting.

Other controls 625 are provided for functions such as, for example, displaying a timestamp on chat messages, using an address book to automatically suggest screen names, displaying the buddy icons of people who send chat messages to the first chat participant, displaying the chat wallpaper of people who send chat messages to the first chat participant, and displaying smileys as art. Controls 630 are provided for the first chat participant to save the changes made, apply the changes, cancel the changes, or get help.

Fig. 7 illustrates an example of a first chat participant UI 700 for enabling a first chat participant to select a buddy icon (i.e., a personalization item). The UI 700 is rendered in response to user manipulation of a control 610b (shown in Fig. 6). In the example of Fig. 7, the first chat participant is presented with a list of buddy icon categories 705 and a list of subcategories 710 corresponding to a selected category. When a first chat participant selects a category 705 and a subcategory 710, a window 715 displays the personalization items available in the selected subcategory. The first chat participant may select a personalization item by, for example, using a mouse or other input device to make a selection among the available personalization items displayed in the window 715. Also, an archive 720 of old personalization items may be provided for first chat participant selection. In another implementation, the first chat participant may provide a custom buddy icon as a personalization item.

Fig. 8 illustrates an example of a UI 800 for enabling a first chat participant to select chat wallpaper. The UI 800 is rendered in response to user manipulation of a control 615b (shown in Fig. 6). In the example of Fig. 8, the first chat participant is presented with a list of chat wallpaper categories 805. When a first chat participant selects a category 805, a window 810 displays the personalization items available in the

selected category. The first chat participant may select a personalization item by, for example, using a mouse or other input device to make a selection among the available items in the window 810. Also, an archive 815 of old personalization items may be provided for user selection. In another implementation, the first chat participant may provide a custom chat wallpaper as a personalization item.

Fig. 9 illustrates yet another example of a UI 900 for enabling a first chat participant to select smiley themes. The UI 900 is rendered in response to user manipulation of a control 620b (shown in Fig. 6). In the example of Fig. 9, the first chat participant is presented with a list of smiley theme categories 905. When a first chat participant selects a category 905, a window 910 displays the personalization items available in the selected category. The first chat participant may select a personalization item by, for example, using a mouse or other input device to make the selection among the available items in the window 910. Also, an archive of old personalization items may be provided for first chat participant selection. In another implementation, the first chat participant may provide a custom smiley theme as a personalization item.

Fig. 10 illustrates one example of a chat UI 1000 that may be presented to a first chat participant of a chat service provider such as provided by America Online. The UI 1000 is rendered in response to user manipulation of a user interface control. In general, the UI 1000 is rendered on the first chat participant system 105 using software stored on the first chat participant system 105. One or more personalization items may be provided for the UI. Generally, to be a part of a conversational group, a user joins a chat room. The chat host system 310 then replicates the messages sent to the chat room by a user (e.g., the first chat participant or a second chat participant) to other users who have joined the chat room.

The UI 1000 includes a chat participant list 1005 that enables a first chat participant of a chat service to, among other things, perceive the presence state of other second chat participants that have joined the chat room, and to send chat messages to second chat participants on the chat participant list 1005. As shown, there are ten chat participants, including the first chat participant 1005a and nine second chat participants 1005b, 1005c, 1005d, 1005e, 1005f, 1005g, 1005h, 1005j present in the chat room. The chat participant list 1005 may include personalization items for each participant. As

shown, the chat participants 1005a, 1005b, 1005c, 1005d, 1005e, 1005f, 1005g, 1005h, and 1005j have corresponding personalization items 1005a₁, 1005b₁, 1005c₁, 1005d₁, 1005e₁, 1005f₁, 1005g₁, 1005h₁, and 1005j₁ displayed respectively. Each chat participant may manually select the personalization items to be displayed in the chat room, or the
5 personalization items may be selected automatically for the chat participant. The personalization items may be rendered to the first chat participant as described above with respect to step 532 of Fig. 5B. The transmission of the personalization items may occur during machine-to-machine communications that are not visible to the user. The chat participant list 1005 also may contain personalized links (not shown) to content and
10 may have a customized appearance. The chat participant list 1005 may have a background image that may be, for example, an image file.

The UI 1000 includes a chat display area 1010 to display the messages 1015a, 1015b, 1015c, 1015d, 1015e of an active chat session 1015. The conversation in the active chat session 1015 normally appears the same for all participants in the chat room.
15 A participant typically converses with other participants by typing a line of text in an edit box 1025 and activating a send command, for example, by pressing the ENTER key of the keyboard of the participant's second chat participant system 305. In response, the entered text is displayed in the chat display area 1010. The participants in the chat room may now see the entered text.

20 As shown, the active chat session 1015 includes the second chat participant and the personalization of the second chat participant next to the text entered by that second chat participant. For example, message 1015a includes the identity of the first chat participant 1005a ("ChattingChuck") and the personalization item 1005a₁ associated with that first chat participant, and message 1015b includes the identity of the second chat
25 participant 1005b ("ItsDarian") and the personalization item 1005b₁ associated with that second chat participant. Also, the style of text may be viewed as a personalization item. For example, the text characters of message 1015a have a "blended" color effect, the text characters of message 1015b have an alternating color effect, and the text characters of message 1015c have a "wavy" effect by alternating superscript and subscript characters.
30 Other combinations are possible. For example, different fonts or effects such as bold, underline, italics, or combinations of these may be used.

In one implementation, the first chat participant may choose a personalization item, such as a buddy icon or an emoticon to be sent in a chat message from the first chat participant to the second chat participant. The first chat participant system sends an identifier corresponding to the personalization item in the chat message, and the second
5 chat participant system retrieves the corresponding personalization item based on the identifier. If the personalization item is not stored locally at the second chat participant system, the second chat participant system requests the personalization item from another source, such as a chat host.

The UI 1000 includes personalization items 1005b1 through 1005j1 from the
10 second chat participant and personalization item 1005a1 from the first chat participant. Typically, the personalization items are transported from the second chat participant to the first chat participant by inserting an identifier corresponding to personalization item into a chat message from the second chat participant to the first chat participant. The first chat participant system 105 receives the chat message and the identifier, and searches for
15 the corresponding chat wallpaper and buddy icon on the system of the first chat participant. If a personalization item is not found on the system of the first chat participant, then the system retrieves the personalization item from a different location, such as, for example, a chat host 305. Once retrieved, the first chat participant system renders the personalization item. A similar process is used when the first chat participant
20 sends a personalization item to be displayed to a second chat participant.

Alternatively, personalization items of the second chat participant may be made available to the first chat participant without having to receive a chat message from the second chat participant. The first chat participant system 105 selects the identifiers corresponding to the personalization items of the second chat participant. The identifiers
25 may be associated with a screen name or other identifying information of the second chat participant. For example, the identifiers may be associated with the screen name of the second chat participant and stored locally at the first chat participant system 105, or the first chat participant system may retrieve the identifiers associated with the screen name of the second chat participant from another location such as the chat host system 310 or
30 another remotely-accessible data store such as the second chat participant system 305 or a remote or third-party server.

Also, as discussed above with respect to step 532 of Fig. 5B, the personalization items of the first chat participant may be rendered to the first chat participant.

The first chat participant system 105 uses the identifiers to determine if the corresponding personalization items are available locally at the first chat participant system, and if so, the first chat participant system retrieves the corresponding personalization items. If the personalization items are not available locally at the first chat participant system 105, the first chat participant system requests the personalization items from another location such as a chat host system 310 or another remotely-accessible data store such as the second chat participant system 305, or a remote or third-party server. Once the first chat participant system 105 locates or receives the personalization items, the first chat participant system renders the items on UI 1000 for perception by the first chat participant.

Similarly, personalization items chosen by the first chat participant may be rendered in UI 1000. These items are typically stored locally on the first chat participant system 105, and may be retrieved by the first chat participant system 105. If an item is not stored locally, the first chat participant system 105 may retrieve the personalization item from a different location such as, for example, a chat host 310. Once retrieved, the first chat participant system 305 renders the personalization items. When the first chat participant sends a chat message to the second chat participants, the personalization items are transported along with the chat message by sending an identifier corresponding to personalization items. As described above with respect to Figs. 5A and 5B, the second chat participant system 305 receives the chat message and the identifier, and searches for the corresponding personalization item on the system of the second chat participant. If a personalization item is not found on the system of the second chat participant, then the second chat participant system 305 may retrieve the personalization item from a different location such as, for example, a chat host 305. Once retrieved, the second chat participant system 305 renders the personalization item. Fig. 11 illustrates one example of a chat UI 1100 is similar to the UI 1000 discussed with respect to Fig. 10. UI 1100 illustrates a color selection interface 1105 that assists a chat participant in selecting a color scheme to be applied to the participants' messages in order to personalize them.

Fig. 12 illustrates one example of a chat UI 1200 is similar to the UI 1000 discussed with respect to Fig. 10. In the UI 1200, however, the chat display area 1010 does not display the names of the chat participants. Instead, one or more personalization items of the chat participants are displayed to represent the participant. For example, in message 1015a, only the personalization item 1005a1 of the first chat participant 1005a is displayed and represents the first chat participant 1005a. Similarly, in message 1015b, only the personalization item 1005b1 of the second chat participant 1005b is displayed and represents the second chat participant 1005b. This may increase the privacy protection of the participants in the chat room.

Fig. 13 illustrates one example of a chat UI 1300 is similar to the UI 1200 discussed with respect to Fig. 12. In the UI 1300, however, the chat participant list 1005 does not display the names of the chat participants. Instead, one or more personalization items of the chat participants are displayed to represent the participant. For example, only the personalization item 1005a1 of the first chat participant 1005a is displayed and represents the first chat participant 1005a in the chat participant list 1005. Similarly, only the personalization item 1005b1 of the second chat participant 1005b is displayed and represents the second chat participant 1005b in the chat participant list 1005. This may increase the privacy protection of the participants in the chat room.

Fig. 14A shows a table 1400A of text based emotions and actions. The emotions and actions may be personalized and may be considered a personalization item in some implementations. For example, the emotions and actions may be distinguished by a color or other characteristic. A chat participant may insert emotions and actions into the chat display area 1010 (Fig. 10). In one implementation, a first chat participant selects the desired second chat participant and selects the desired emotion and/or action to produce an output that will appear in the chat display area. For example, table 1400 illustrates examples of various combinations of first chat participant 1405, emotion 1410, action 1415, second chat participant 1420, text 1425, the chat outputs generated 1430, and IM outputs generated 1435. An action in the IM environment may be used to trigger different actions in the chat environment. The table 1400A may be stored in a data storage such as data store 320 described above with respect to Fig. 3.

Referring to Fig. 14B, a table 1400B provides a mapping for one or more personalization items 1450 to definitions in chat 1455 and definitions in IM 1460. The mapping may be made between the chat personalization items, opportunities, and settings and IM personalization items, opportunities, and settings. The mapping enables

5 something defined in IM for a particular context encountered in IM to be used for a different context in chat, or vice versa. For example, presence in IM may be defined as the use of the IM application by a user, whereas presence in chat may be defined as participation in a chat room. Therefore, the IM personalization item, such as a sound of a door opening, for becoming present in the IM context may be applied to chat. However,

10 the application in chat for becoming present is not beginning to use the chat application by the user, but instead for entry into one of several chat rooms. The mapping may be modified, for example, by the user or by a system administrator. In another example, a personalization item 1450 may be subject to a definition in chat 1455 that differs from the definition in IM 1460. The definitions may be modified by the user, a system

15 administrator, or automatically.

Fig. 15 illustrates an exemplary UI 1500 for enabling a chat participant to track the messages from another chat participant. The tracking may be customized and may be considered a personalization item in one implementation. For example, the tracking may be controlled by the first chat participant and accomplished through color or other text

20 changes chosen by the first chat participant and tracked in the chat display area 1010 of the chat UI 1000 (Fig. 10). In another implementation, the appearance of the tracked text is controlled by the second chat participant.

Referring to Figs. 16 and 17 the first chat participant system 105 and the host system 110, such as a chat host system 310, interact according to exemplary procedure

25 1600 to enable a first chat participant to select a personalization item and according to exemplary procedure 1700 to make the host-based personalization item selected by the first chat participant in procedure 1600 perceivable to the first chat participant.

Procedures 1600 and 1700 may be implemented by various types of hardware, software, device, computer, computer system, equipment, component, program,

30 application, code, storage medium, or propagated signal. Although not shown in Figs. 16 and 17, the first chat participant system 105 and the host system 110 may be directly or

indirectly interconnected through known or described delivery networks, examples of which are described with respect to network 160.

The procedures 1600 and 1700 may be implemented in a client/host context, or a standalone or offline client context. For example, while some functions of procedures 1600 and 1700 may be performed entirely by the first chat participant system 105, other functions may be performed by host system 110, or the collective operation of the first chat participant system 105 and the host system 110. The host system 110 is a computer remote to the chat operator systems, and may be, for example, a chat host system 310. In procedures 1600 and 1700, the personalization item may be respectively selected and rendered by the standalone/offline device, and the personalization item may be accessed or updated through a remote device in a non-client/host environment such as, for example, a LAN server serving an end user or a mainframe serving a terminal device. Thus, the procedures 1600 and 1700 described below may be implemented for any OSP, ISP, browser and/or other software program having a graphical user interface, such as programs for chat, instant messaging, electronic mail and stand-alone browsers.

Procedure 1600 generally involves selecting a personalization item. In the procedure 1600, the first chat participant system 105 logs in or otherwise accesses the host system 110 (step 1605). For instance, first chat participant system 105 may connect to the host system 110 across a network (e.g., network 160) by supplying verifiable credentials to a server (e.g., a login server) at the host system 110. More specifically, a browser may be used to access a web-available interface, a chat message may be used to access a selectable interface, or a chat client that has an interface to a host may be used, among other options.

The host system 110 identifies (e.g., through a lookup) and accesses personalization items associated with the first chat participant for selection by the first chat participant system 105 (step 1610). In one implementation, the host system 110 may use a screen name of the first chat participant system 105 or another identification of the first chat participant system 105 to select/identify personalization items available to the first chat participant system 105. IM personalization items may be leveraged in the identification and access of the personalization items, as discussed, for example, with respect to Fig. 5A and Fig. 3.

Next, the host system 110 enables perception by the first chat participant system 105 of personalization items and/or menus enabling the selection of personalization items (step 1615). Figs. 6-9 describe various interfaces available to the operator, which may be used to select personalization items and which will be described below. Based on the
5 personalization items or menus provided or otherwise made perceivable to the operator of the first chat participant system 105, the first chat participant system selects personalization item(s) of interest (step 1620).

The host system 110 receives the personalization item selection from the first chat participant system 105 (step 1625), associates the selection with an identifier for the
10 selected personalization items, and determines the identifier for the selected personalization item(s) (step 1630). The identifier typically includes information allowing the corresponding personalization item to be located and retrieved. For example, the identifier may include a location of the personalization item. The identifier also may include a type identifier that identifies the personalization item as, for example,
15 an icon, a chat wallpaper, an emoticon, or a sound. The type identifier also may include a file format for the personalization item. The identifier may include one or more flags to indicate whether the personalization item is, for example, a custom item or an "official" item, whether the personalization item has been banned, or whether the personalization item has expired. Where appropriate, another flag may redirect the recipient to a
20 different personalization item. The identifier may further include information concerning the size of the personalization item. The identifier may have a predetermined format and a predetermined length.

Optionally, the identifier may be stored at the host (step 1635). The host system 110 may store the identifier(s) in a memory or other storage, either local or remote to the
25 host system 110. The host system 110 also may send the identifier(s) to the first chat participant system 105. The first chat participant may have chosen a personalization item from a location including the first chat participant system 105, the host system 110, or another host system. When the first chat participant chooses a personalization item that is locally stored on the first chat participant system 105, an identifier may be created for
30 the chosen personalization item based upon a hash of the item data. The identifier, when sent to the a remote location such as the host 110, may be checked to determine if the

chosen personalization item is already known to the host system, and if so, whether the personalization item is designated as, for example, an official item. This allows the first chat participant to select personalization items from the first chat participant's own client system, but prevents the host system or other remote location from needing to store
5 duplicate copies of the same items. Also, the host system or other remote location is able to determine if such items are specially designated as, for example, official items and may be rendered to users who desire to view only items so designated.

Finally, the first chat participant system 105 optionally receives the identifier(s) for the selected personalization items to enable storage at the first chat participant system
10 (step 1640).

The relative order of steps 1605-1635 with respect to other steps in procedure 1600, and also with respect to each other, may vary. Certain steps may be omitted entirely, as appropriate.

Fig. 6 illustrates one example of a first chat participant UI 600 for enabling a first
15 chat participant to select personalization items, and is discussed above with respect to Figs. 5A and 5B.

Fig. 7 illustrates an example of a first chat participant UI 700 for enabling a first chat participant to select a buddy icon (i.e., a personalization item) and is described above with respect to Figs. 5A and 5B.

Fig. 8 illustrates an example of a UI 800 for enabling a first chat participant to
20 select chat wallpaper (i.e., a personalization item) and is discussed above with respect to Figs. 5A and 5B.

Fig. 9 illustrates an example of a UI 900 for enabling a first chat participant to select smiley themes (i.e., a personalization item) and is discussed above with respect to
25 Figs. 5A and 5B.

As discussed with respect to Figs. 6-9, the personalization item perception and selection may be assisted by user interfaces 600, 700, 800 and 900, which enable the first chat participant to make a selection using a mouse or other input device.

Personalization item(s) may be selected manually by the first chat participant or
30 the personalization item(s) may be automatically selected for the first chat participant. The first chat participant personalization items may be made available to the first chat

participant system by obtaining one or more identifiers corresponding to the personalization items selected the first chat participant. The identifiers may be associated with a screen name or other identifying information of the first chat participant. For example, the identifiers may be associated with the screen name of the first chat participant and stored locally at the first chat participant system, or the first chat participant system may retrieve the identifiers associated with the screen name of the first chat participant from another location, such as a host system, including the chat host system, or another remotely-accessible data store.

Referring to Fig. 17, an exemplary process 1700 may be used to render a personalization item. In procedure 1700, the first chat participant system 105 loads/invokes a local application (1705). The invocation may result from user selection of the interface or it may occur automatically in response to a triggering event, such as the receipt of a chat message. Loading/invoking a local application may include invoking an application having an interfaces that renders a personalization item such as, for example, a chat program having a local client or local interface (e.g., a browser).

The local application may be loaded/invoked (1705) at various times. In one implementation, a local application having personalization items to be rendered may be loaded/invoked upon literal loading of the client application. For instance, the application may be loaded or invoked without regard to whether the personalization items are being rendered in the main interface of the application or in a sub-interface of the application. In another implementation, a local application having personalization items to be rendered may be loaded/invoked only after an interface within the application is invoked that requires a host-based personalization item, even if the application itself were previously loaded/invoked. For example, a chat communications window may be invoked after the chat application has been loaded. In yet another implementation, a local application having personalization items to be rendered may be loaded/invoked upon receiving a status updated from a remote source other than the host system 110. For example, while a chat communications window/session is open, if the application is notified that the status of the remote communications has changed, the process may be invoked such that an identifier is accessed based on the received message or credentials,

for example, the screen name of the party whose status has changed, and used as the basis for identifying an appropriate personalization item from the host.

In one implementation, the personalization items are not downloaded until a triggering event occurs. Once a triggering event, such as the loading of an application UI, occurs, the personalization item may be down loaded.

Next, the first chat participant system 105 accesses the identifier(s) associated with possible personalization items to be rendered with respect to the first chat participant (step 1710). For example, where identifier(s) have been selected, received, and subsequently stored by the first chat participant system 105, as described with respect to step 1635 of procedure 1600, they then are submitted to the appropriate host for retrieval of the personalization item(s) corresponding to the identifier(s) (step 1715). In one implementation, the first chat participant system 105 requests the corresponding personalization item from the host system 110 or a location otherwise specified by or inferred from the identifier. That is, the first chat participant system 105 may request the corresponding personalization item from another location such as a remote, third party server different from host system 110.

Thus, the identifier generally identifies the personalization items that reside on the host. It may do so explicitly, by referencing particular personalization items or indirect addressing for such personalization items stored elsewhere, or it may do so indirectly by referencing groups of personalization items. Where indirect, it may identify a predefined grouping, or it may instead merely identify the user specifically (e.g., a screen name) or by class (e.g., business class user to be provided business class personalization items).

The identifiers corresponding to the personalization items to be projected by the first chat participant may be chosen on behalf of the first chat participant system by others, or may be presented to the first chat participant to depict the status or attributes of others. The identifier may be chosen to override or supplement a selection of personalization items to be projected by others, or may be chosen as a default in the absence of a selection by others.

Next, the host system 110 receives the identifier call from the first chat participant system 105 (step 1720), and the host system accesses the personalization item(s) associated with the identifier(s) (step 1725). Where indirect personalization item

identifiers are used, the host system 110 uses the received identifier to locate other identifiers for personalization items associated with the submitted identifier.

Thereafter, the host system 110 communicates personalization items to (or on behalf of) the first chat participant system 105 with the personalization item(s) corresponding to the submitted identifier(s) (step 1730), and the first chat participant system 105 renders the personalization item(s) (step 1735). Upon receipt of personalization items from the host system 110, the first chat participant system 105 save the personalization item(s) in a memory or other storage at the local first chat participant system 105 (e.g., it may cache them for future access/display).

The relative order of steps 1705-1735 with respect to other steps in procedure 1700, and also with respect to each other, may vary. Certain steps may be omitted entirely, as appropriate.

Fig. 10 shows an example of a chat participant list 1005 and is discussed above with respect to Figs. 5A and 5B.

The chat participant list bar 1105 may contain personalized links 1105a, 1105b, 1105c, and 1105d to content and may have a customized appearance. The chat participant list image 1110 and the chat participant list background image 1115 may be, for example, image files from a remote source. The chat participant list background image 1115 may have a washed out appearance. The chat participant list fill pattern 1120 may be a color or pattern background for the buddy list, or may also be an image. One or more of these personalization items may be transmitted to a first chat participant and rendered on the first chat participant system 105. The transmission of the personalization items may occur during machine-to-machine communications that are not visible to the user.

Fig. 10 illustrates one example of a chat UI 1000 and is discussed above with respect to Figs. 5A and 5B.

Referring to Fig. 18, procedure 1800 illustrates one possible method for discerning between personalization items to be retrieved locally by the first chat participant system 105 and items to be retrieved remotely from the first chat participant system. In procedure 1800, after the first chat participant system accesses identifier(s) associated with possible personalization items to be rendered (1710, see procedure 1700),

the first chat participant system 105 determines whether the corresponding personalization item is available locally (step 1810). For example, the first chat participant system 105 may have stored the corresponding personalization in a local memory or another local storage location, and the identifier may specify or be otherwise
5 useful in determining the location at which the corresponding personalization item is stored.

If the corresponding personalization item is not available locally, the first chat participant system 105 submits the identifiers to the appropriate host (step 1715), as described above with respect to procedure 1700.

10 If the corresponding personalization item is available locally, the first chat participant system retrieves the corresponding personalization item (step 1815), and then renders the personalization item (step 1735) as described above with respect to procedure 1700.

In another implementation, the host is first interrogated as to whether the
15 corresponding personalization item is located on the host. In another implementation, a list is maintained and a search is performed on the list or on a known directory or location.

Figs. 19, 21, 22, and 23 illustrate exemplary procedures 1900, 2100, 2200, and 2300 to make a personalization item selected by an intended chat destination recipient
20 perceivable to the first chat participant during a chat communications session, and, in particular, to render the personalization item associated with an intended second chat participant to the first chat participant prior to the communication of a chat message with the intended recipient system.

Procedures 1900, 2100, 2200, and 2300 generally involve rendering a
25 personalization item and may be implemented by various types of hardware, software, device, computer, computer system, equipment, component, program, application, code, storage medium, or propagated signal. In one implementation, a host 110 may be used in place of the chat host 310. Furthermore, although not shown in Figs. 19, 21, 22, and 23, the first chat participant system 105 and the chat host system 310 may be directly or
30 indirectly interconnected through known or described delivery networks, examples of which are described with respect to network 160.

The procedures 1900, 2100, 2200, and 2300 may be implemented in a client/host context, or a standalone or offline client context. For example, while some functions of procedures 1900, 2100, 2200, and 2300 may be performed entirely by the first chat participant system 105, other functions may be performed by the chat host system 310 or
5 the collective operation of the first chat participant system 105 and the chat host system 310. For instance, a personalization item may be rendered entirely by the first chat participant system 105, or the personalization item may be rendered based upon information provided to the first chat participant system 105 by the chat host system 310.

The personalization item may be rendered by the standalone/offline device and
10 may be accessed or updated through a remote device in a non-client/host environment such as, for example, a LAN server serving an end user or a mainframe serving a terminal device. Thus, the procedures 1900, 2100, 2200, and 2300 described below may be implemented for any OSP, ISP, browser and/or other software program having a graphical user interface, such as programs for chat, chat, electronic mail and stand-alone
15 browsers.

Referring to Fig. 19, in the procedure 1900, the first chat participant opens a chat application on the first chat participant system 105 (step 1905). Fig. 6 describes an exemplary interface available to the first chat participant, which may be used to open a chat application on the first chat participant system and which will be described below.

20 Next, an intended destination recipient (hereinafter "second chat participant") is selected (step 1910). Selecting an intended destination recipient includes making a selection so that a message will be posted in the chat room. Fig. 20 illustrates an exemplary interface available to the first chat participant, which will be described below, and which may be used to select an intended destination recipient.

25 Next, a chat user interface (UI) is opened to enable selection of information to be communicated to the intended destination (step 1915). A user interface may be manipulated to open a chat user interface.

Finally, the personalization items associated with the selected second chat
participant are rendered in the chat UI subsequently, during the present and future chat
30 sessions involving the intended destination (step 1920). Fig. 20 describes an exemplary interface available to the first chat participant which may be used when rendering the

personalization items of the selected second chat participant, and which will be described below.

The second chat participant may have chosen a personalization item from a location including the second chat participant system 305, the chat host system 310, or
 5 another host system. When the second chat participant chooses a personalization item that is locally stored on the second chat participant system 305, an identifier may be created for the chosen personalization item based upon a hash of the item data. The identifier, when sent to the a remote location such as the chat host 310, may be checked to determine if the chosen personalization item is already known to the host system, and
 10 if so, whether the personalization item is designated as, for example, an official item. This allows the second chat participant to select personalization items from the second chat participant's own client system, but prevents the host system or other remote location from needing to store duplicate copies of the same items. Also, the host system or other remote location is able to determine if such items are specially designated as, for
 15 example, official items and may be rendered to users who desire to view only items so designated. Fig. 20 illustrates an example of a UI 2000 that may be presented to a user of a chat service provider. The UI 2000 is similar to that described above with respect to Fig. 10, however, not chat communications have yet taken place in the chat room with respect to a chat participant whose personalization items are to be rendered. In particular,
 20 the UI 2000 includes a chat participant list 1005 that enables a first chat participant of a chat service to, among other things, perceive the presence state of other second chat participants that have joined the chat room, and to send chat messages to second chat participants on the chat participant list 1005. As shown, there are ten chat participants, including the first chat participant 1005a and nine second chat participants 1005b, 1005c,
 25 1005d, 1005e, 1005f, 1005g, 1005h, 1005j present in the chat room. The chat participant list 1005 may include personalization items for each participant. As shown, the chat participants 1005a, 1005b, 1005c, 1005d, 1005e, 1005f, 1005g, 1005h, and 1005j have corresponding personalization items 1005a₁, 1005b₁, 1005c₁, 1005d₁, 1005e₁, 1005f₁, 1005g₁, 1005h₁, and 1005j₁ displayed respectively.

The UI 2000 includes a chat display area 1010 to display the messages of an active chat session 1015. An active chat session has not yet begun in the example of Fig. 20.

Personalization items of the second chat participant may be made available to the first chat participant upon activating UI 1000 and without having to wait to receive a communication such as a chat message from the second chat participant. The first chat participant system 105 selects the identifiers corresponding to the personalization items of the second chat participant. The identifiers may be associated with a screen name or other identifying information of the second chat participant. For example, the identifiers may be associated with the screen name of the second chat participant and stored locally at the first chat participant system 105, or the first chat participant system may retrieve the identifiers associated with the screen name of the second chat participant from another location such as the chat host system 310 or another remotely-accessible data store such as the second chat participant system 305 or a remote or third-party server.

The first chat participant system 105 uses the identifiers to determine if the corresponding personalization items are available locally at the first chat participant system, and if so, the first chat participant system retrieves the corresponding personalization items. If the personalization items are not available locally at the first chat participant system 105, the first chat participant system requests the personalization items from another location such as a chat host system 310 or another remotely-accessible data store. Once the first chat participant system 105 locates or receives the personalization items of the second chat participant, the first chat participant system renders the items on UI 1000 for perception by the first chat participant.

For example, wallpaper or a different personalization item reflective of settings established for a selected buddy may be rendered on the chat participant list 1010 of the first chat participant when the first chat participant rolls a mouse pointer over the name of the second chat participant or otherwise specifies a user in the chat participant list 1005. In another implementation, the first chat participant may tie their wallpaper or other personalization item setting to follow that of a selected buddy on the chat participant list 1010. In other words, the personalization item of the first chat participant may be set to follow that of a selected second chat participant, for example second chat participant

1005b, such that when second chat participant 1005b makes a change to the wallpaper or other personalization item, the resulting change is reflected to the first chat participant in the personalization items rendered for the first chat participant.

chat personalization items of the second chat participant may be rendered by
5 various types of hardware, software, device, computer, computer system, equipment, component, program, application, code, storage medium, or propagated signal. In one implementation, the chat personalization items may be rendered in a client/host context, and the chat personalization items may be accessed or updated through a remote device in a client/host environment. In another implementation, the chat personalization items may
10 be implemented in a standalone or offline client context. The chat personalization items may be rendered by the standalone/offline device and may be accessed or updated through a remote device in a non-client/host environment such as, for example, a LAN (Local Area Network) server serving an end user or a mainframe serving a terminal device.

15 Regarding Fig. 21, procedure 2100 shows one possible implementation of rendering a personalization item associated with the selected second chat participant (step 1920), as described with respect to Fig. 19. In procedure 2100, personalization items of the selected second chat participant may be made available to the first chat participant system and rendered at the first chat participant system based on identifiers
20 corresponding to the personalization items of the second chat participant, which may be maintained or accessed by the chat host system 310.

In procedure 2100, the first chat participant system 105 first sends the identifier corresponding to the personalization item to the chat host system 310 (step 2125). The identifiers may be associated with a screen name or other identifying information of the
25 second chat participant. For example, the identifiers may be associated with the screen name of the second chat participant and stored locally at the first chat participant system, or the first chat participant system may retrieve the identifiers associated with the screen name of the second chat participant from another location, such as the chat host system or another remotely-accessible data store.

30 The chat host system 310 receives the identifier from the first chat participant system 105 (step 2130).

Next, the chat host system 310 looks up the personalization item(s) associated with the identifier (step 2135), and retrieves the personalization item(s) corresponding to the identifier (step 2140). In other words, the first chat participant system uses the identifier to determine if the corresponding personalization item is available locally at the first chat participant system, and if so, the first chat participant system retrieves the corresponding personalization item. When the personalization item is not available locally at the first chat participant system, the first chat participant system 105 requests the personalization item by sending the selected identifier to the chat host system 310 or another remotely-accessible data store (not shown). Alternatively, the personalization item itself may be associated with the second chat participant and retrieved by the first chat participant system 105.

Ultimately, the personalization item(s) are returned to the first chat participant system 105 (step 2145).

The corresponding personalization item(s) are received by the first chat participant system 105 (step 2150). Receiving the corresponding personalization item may include saving (e.g., caching) the personalization item in a memory or other storage at the local first chat participant system 105.

Finally, the chat UI is populated with the personalization item(s) (step 2155). That is, once the first chat participant system locates or receives the personalization item, the first chat participant system renders the item for perception by the first chat participant. As shown with respect to Fig. 7, the personalization items to be populated may include a buddy icon 709 or chat wallpaper 707.

The relative order of steps 1905-1930 with respect to other steps in procedure 1900, and the relative order of steps 2125-2155 with respect to other steps in procedure 2100, and also with respect to each other, may vary. Also, certain steps may be omitted entirely, as appropriate.

Figs. 22 and 23 show one possible implementation of the procedures discussed with respect to Figs. 19 and 21. The first chat participant system 105 and the chat host system 310 interact according to exemplary procedures 2200 and 2300 to make a personalization item selected by the second chat participant perceivable to the first chat participant during a chat communications session. Figs. 22 and 23 differ from Figs. 19

and 21 in that personalization items are made available in response to a triggering event (e.g., a detected change in presence of a user being monitored) rather than in response to invocation of an application or application interface.

Referring to Fig. 22, in the procedure 2200, the first chat participant system 105 and the chat host system 310 are physically and/or logically connected (step 2205). For instance, first chat participant system 105 may connect to the chat host system 310 across a network (e.g., network 160) by supplying a first chat participant identification and password to a server (e.g., a login server) in order to obtain access to the chat host system 310.

Next, the presence state or presence state change of the second chat participant system 305, e.g., login state, is detected by the chat host system 310 (step 2208). The chat host system 310 may detect presence states or state changes, such as, for example, when the second chat participant signs out, is inactive for a period of time, becomes active after having been inactive for a period of time, indicates an ability to receive chat messages, or indicates an inability to receive chat messages. A pool of potential second chat participants may be monitored and associated with the screen name of a sender through use of a chat participant list or similar mechanism. Alternatively, the entire user base may be monitored or some intelligent method of monitoring potential second chat participants may be used. The first chat participant may select one or more second chat participant to whom the first chat participant may wish to send a chat message.

After detecting the presence state or state change of the second chat participant system 305, the chat host system 310 may send or otherwise make accessible to the first chat participant system 105 and other chat systems a notification of the second chat participant presence state change or state change (step 2214). Sending notification of the presence state change may include sending an identifier corresponding to a personalization item selected by the second chat participant system 305. For example, the chat host system 310 may send an identifier corresponding to a sound chosen by the second chat participant for the presence state change.

In one implementation, the chat host system 310 assigns an identifier to the personalization item. In another implementation, the second chat participant system 305

assigns the identifier to the personalization item. In yet another implementation, the identifier is assigned by a host system other than the chat host system 310.

The identifier typically includes information allowing the corresponding personalization item to be located and retrieved. For example, the identifier may include a location of the personalization item. The identifier also may include a type identifier that identifies the personalization item as, for example, an icon, a chat wallpaper, an emoticon, or a sound. The type identifier also may include a file format of the personalization item. Also, the identifier may include one or more flags to indicate, for example, if the personalization item is a custom item or an "official" item, has been banned, or has expired. Another flag may redirect the sender to a different personalization item. The identifier may further include information concerning the size of the personalization item. The identifier may be in a predetermined format and may be of a predetermined length.

The first chat participant system 105 receives the notification from the chat host system 310 (step 2216). In the above example, receiving the notification may include receiving an identifier corresponding to a personalization item selected by the second chat participant system 305.

Next, the first chat participant system 105 determines whether the corresponding personalization item is locally available (step 2218). For example, the first chat participant system 105 may have stored the personalization in a local memory or another local storage location. The first chat participant system uses the identifier to determine whether the corresponding personalization item is locally available. For instance, the identifier may contain the location at which the corresponding personalization item is stored.

If the corresponding personalization item is available locally, the first chat participant system retrieves the corresponding personalization item (step 2220) and renders the personalization item (step 2230).

Otherwise, if the corresponding personalization item is not available locally, the first chat participant system 105 requests the corresponding personalization item from the chat host system 310 or a location otherwise specified by or inferred from the identifier (step 2222). That is, the first chat participant system 105 may request the corresponding

personalization item from another location such as the second chat participant system 305 or a remote, third party server. Requesting the corresponding personalization item may include sending the identifier associated with the personalization item to the chat host system 310 along with a request to download the personalization item to the first chat participant system 105.

When the chat host system 310 receives the request for a personalization item from the first chat participant system (step 2224), the chat host system 310 provides the corresponding personalization item to the first chat participant system (step 2226). Receiving the request may include having the chat host system 310 receive the identifier associated with the personalization item along with a request to download the personalization item to the first chat participant system 105.

Next, the corresponding personalization item is received by the first chat participant system (step 2228), which may save the personalization item in a memory or other storage at the local first chat participant system 105. Then, the personalization item is rendered (step 2230). For example, as discussed above, the personalization items may include personalization items for a chat participant list 0.

Referring to Fig. 23, in procedure 2300, a chat message application is opened by the first chat participant system 105 (step 2335), in a similar manner to that discussed with respect to step 1905 of Fig. 19. The first chat participant may also open a chat UI, such as the UI 2000 shown in Fig. 20 and select an intended destination recipient, as discussed above with respect to steps 1910 and 1915 of Fig. 19. In one implementation, rather than relying on a mechanism such as a chat participant list or a state change to identify users for which personalization items will be made available, a mechanism identifies the users for which personalization items will be made available based on users selected by the first chat participants for communications.

To make the personalization items of the second chat participant available to the first chat participant the first chat participant system 105 selects the identifiers corresponding to the personalization items) of the second chat participant. The identifiers may be associated with a screen name or other identifying information of the second chat participant. As such, personalization items of the second chat participant may be made

available to the first chat participant before the receipt by the first chat participant of a chat from the second chat participant.

The first chat participant system 105 uses the identifiers to identify the personalization item associated with the recipient, and to locate perceivable content
5 corresponding to the identifier.

Because various aspects of steps 2336-2350 are similar to those discussed above with respect to steps 2216-2230 of procedure 2200, the following discussion of steps 2336-2350 is somewhat abbreviated.

The first chat participant system 105 obtains an identifier from the chat host
10 system 310 (step 2336) corresponding to the personalization item selected by the first chat participant system 105, as discussed above with respect to step 2216.

Next, the first chat participant system 105 determines whether the corresponding personalization item is available locally (step 2338). As discussed above with respect to step 2218, the first chat participant system 105 may have stored the personalization in a
15 local memory or other local storage location. The first chat participant system 105 uses the identifier to determine whether the corresponding personalization is available locally. For instance, the identifier may contain the location at which the corresponding personalization item is stored.

If the corresponding personalization item is available locally, the first chat
20 participant system 105 retrieves the corresponding personalization item (step 2340) and the personalization item is rendered (step 2350).

Otherwise, if the corresponding personalization item is not available locally, the first chat participant system 105 requests the corresponding personalization item from the chat host system 310 (step 2342). Alternatively, as discussed above with respect to step
25 2222, the first chat participant system 105 may request the corresponding personalization item from another location. In one implementation, the personalization item may be provided by a third party, and may be made available in consideration of a payment by the first chat participant or the second chat participant. Requesting the corresponding personalization item may include sending to the chat host system 310 the identifier
30 associated with the personalization item along with a request to download the personalization item to the first chat participant system 105.

The chat host system 310 receives the request for the personalization item from the first chat participant system 105 (step 2344). As discussed above with respect to step 2224, receiving the request may include receiving the identifier associated with the personalization item along with a request to download the personalization item to the first chat participant system 105. The chat host system 310 provides the corresponding personalization item to the first chat participant system 105 (step 2346).

The corresponding personalization item is received by the first chat participant system 105 (step 2348). As discussed above with respect to step 2228, receiving the corresponding personalization item may include saving the personalization item in a memory or other storage at the local first chat participant system 105.

Finally, the personalization item is rendered (step 2350). As discussed with respect to Fig. 7, the personalization item to be rendered may include a buddy icon or chat wallpaper.

The relative order of steps 2205-2230 with respect to other steps in procedure 2200, and the relative order of steps 2335-2350 with respect to other steps in procedure 2300, and also with respect to each other, may vary. Also, certain steps may be omitted entirely, as appropriate. For example, referring to Fig. 22, if the second chat participant has not chosen a personalization item to be sent to the first chat participant system 105 upon a presence state change, then no such item will be sent and steps 2216-2230 may be eliminated entirely.

In one implementation, a buddy icon of a second chat participant may be shown in a chat participant list, or other personalization items of a second chat participant may be shown in a chat participant list.

Referring to Figs. 24 and 25, the first chat participant system 105 and the chat host system 310 interact according to exemplary procedure 2400 to enable a first chat participant to select a personalization item, and the first chat participant system 105, the chat host system 310, and the second chat participant system 305 interact according to exemplary procedure 2500 to make the personalization item selected in procedure 2400 perceivable to the second chat participant.

Procedures 2400 and 2500 may be implemented by various types of hardware, software, device, computer, computer system, equipment, component, program,

application, code, storage medium, or propagated signal. Although not shown in Figs. 24 and 25, the first chat participant system 105 and the chat host system 310 may be directly or indirectly interconnected through known or described delivery networks, examples of which are described with respect to network 160.

5 Procedures 2400 and 2500 may be implemented in a client/host context, or a standalone or offline client context. For example, while some functions of procedures 2400 and 2500 may be performed entirely by the first chat participant system 105 or the second chat participant system 305, other functions may be performed by the chat host system 310 or the collective operation of the first chat participant system 105, and/or the
10 second chat participant system 305, and/or the chat host system 310. The personalization item may be respectively selected and rendered by the standalone/offline device, and the personalization item may be accessed or updated through a remote device in a non-client/host environment such as, for example, a LAN server serving an end user or a mainframe serving a terminal device. Thus, the procedures 2400 and 2500 described
15 below may be implemented for any OSP, ISP, browser and/or other software program having a graphical user interface, such as programs for chat, instant messaging, electronic mail and stand-alone browsers.

 Procedure 2400 generally involves selecting a personalization item. In the procedure 2400, the first chat participant system 105 logs into or otherwise accesses the
20 chat host system 310 (step 2405). For instance, first chat participant system 105 may connect to the chat host system 310 across a network (e.g., network 160) by supplying credentials to a server (e.g., a login server). More specifically, a browser may be used to access a web-available interface, a chat message may be used to access a selectable interface, or a chat client that has an interface to a host may be used, among other
25 options.

 The chat host system 310 accesses personalization item appropriate for and selectable by the first chat participant system 105 (step 2410). In one implementation, the chat host system 310 may use a screen name of the first chat participant system 105 or another identification of the first chat participant system 105 to select/identify
30 personalization item available to the first chat participant system 105.

Next, the chat host system 310 enables perception by the first chat participant system 105 of personalization item and/or menus enabling the selection of personalization item by the first chat participant system 105 (step 2415). Figs 6-9, discussed above, describe various interfaces available to the user, which may be used to select personalization item.

Based on the personalization item or menus provided or otherwise made perceivable to the first chat participant system, the first chat participant system selects personalization item of interest (step 2420).

The first chat participant may have selected personalization item from a location including the first chat participant system 105, the chat host system 310, or another host system. When the first chat participant chooses personalization item that is locally stored on the first chat participant system 105, an identifier may be created for the chosen personalization item based upon a hash of the item data. The identifier, when sent to the a remote location such as the chat host 310, may be checked to determine if the chosen personalization item is already known to the host system, and if so, whether the personalization item is designated as, for example, an official item. This allows the first chat participant to select personalization item from the first chat participant's own client system, but prevents the host system or other remote location from needing to store duplicate copies of the same items. Also, the host system or other remote location is able to determine if such items are specially designated as, for example, official items and may be rendered to users who desire to view only items so designated.

The chat host system 310 receives the personalization item selection from the first chat participant system 105 (step 2425), and responsive thereto, the chat host system 310 sends and/or stores one or more of the selected personalization item (step 2430). The chat host system 310 may store the item(s) in a memory or other storage, either local or remote to the chat host system 310. The chat host system 310 also may send the item(s) to the first chat participant system 105 in a communication such as a chat message, or in communication associated with such a message.

Finally, the first chat participant system 105 receives the selected personalization item (step 2435). The items may include information allowing the personalization item to be rendered by the second chat participant system. For example, the personalization

item may include a type identifier that identifies the personalization item as personalization item. Also, the personalization item may include one or more flags to indicate, for example, if the personalization item is a custom item or an "official" item, has been banned, or has expired. The personalization item may further include
5 information concerning its size. The personalization item may be in a predetermined format and may be of a predetermined length.

The relative order of steps 2405-2435 with respect to other steps in procedure 2400, and also with respect to each other, may vary. Furthermore, certain steps may be omitted entirely, as appropriate.

10 As discussed with respect to Figs. 6-9, the personalization item perception and selection may be assisted by user interfaces 600, 700, 800 and 900, and the first chat participant may make the selection using a mouse or other input device. Personalization item may be selected manually by the first chat participant or the personalization item may be automatically selected for the first chat participant.

15 Procedure 2500 generally involves transporting and rendering personalization item. In procedure 2500, the first chat participant system 105 accesses the chat host system 310 as described with respect to Fig. 24 (2405).

The first chat participant opens a chat application on the first chat participant system 105 (step 2510).

20 Next, one or more personalization item are selected, for example, in the manner discussed with respect to Fig. 24, and the selected items are accessed by the first chat participant system 105 (step 2515). As discussed with respect to Figs. 6-9 the selection may be made with the assistance of interfaces 600, 700, 800, and 900, and the first chat participant may make the selection using a mouse or other input device. The
25 personalization item may be selected manually by the first chat participant or may be automatically selected for the first chat participant. Typically, the items are stored at the first chat participant system 105. However, the items may be stored at other locations such as the chat host system 310 or another host system.

30 Next, a second chat participant is selected (step 2520). For example, as shown with respect to Fig. 10, a buddy 1025a may be selected from a buddy list 1025.

Thereafter, a chat message, including the selected personalization item, is generated by the first chat participant system 105 and sent to the second chat participant system 305 (step 2530). The first chat participant system 105 need not supply the chat host system 310 with the selected personalization item. Rather, the chat host system 310 may append or otherwise communicate the personalization item to the second chat participant, even if a message without personalization item is sent by the first chat participant system 105, based upon the host having knowledge of the personalization item selected by the first chat participant system 105, or based upon an identifier that may be provided by the first chat participant system 105 to the chat host system 310 rather than the personalization item itself.

The chat host system 310 receives the instant message and the item (step 2535). The chat host system 310 then may optionally authenticate the instant message for security purposes (step 2540)

The chat host system 310 sends the chat message and the selected personalization item(s) to the second chat participant system 305 (step 2545).

The second chat participant system 305 receives the chat with the personalization item(s) from the chat host system 310 (step 2550). The personalization item(s) may be received in a single message, or portions of the personalization item(s) may be transported in more than one message and the complete personalization item assembled at the second chat participant system 305.

The second chat participant system 305 accesses the personalization item(s) or portions of the personalization item(s) available at the second chat participant system (step 2555).

Next, the second chat participant system 305 determines whether the personalization item is ready to be rendered (step 2560).

If the corresponding personalization item is ready for rendering, the second chat participant system 305 renders the personalization item (step 2565), as described below with respect to step 2565. The personalization item may be ready for rendering in its entirety if the entire personalization item has been received. The second chat participant system 305 may wait until the entire personalization item is received to render the

personalization item. Otherwise, the personalization item may be progressively rendered by the second chat participant system 305.

If the personalization item is not available for rendering, the second chat participant system 305 waits until the personalization item is available for rendering.

5 The relative order of steps 2510-2565 with respect to other steps in procedure 2500, and also with respect to each other, may vary. For example, a recipient may be selected in step 2520 before accessing personalization item in step 2515.

10 Fig. 10, discussed above, illustrates an example of a UI 1000 that may be presented to a user of a chat service. The UI 1100 includes personalization items from the second chat participants and personalization items from the first chat participant. A personalization item may be transported from the second chat participant to the first chat participant by inserting the personalization item into a chat message from the second chat participant to the first chat participant. The first chat participant system 105 receives the instant message containing the embedded personalization item and renders the
15 personalization item.

Similarly, a personalization item chosen by the first chat participant may be rendered in UI 1000. When the first chat participant sends a chat message to a second chat participant, the personalization item may be transported along with the chat message. Once received, the second chat participant system 305 renders the personalization item.

20 Fig. 10 also shows an example of a chat participant list 1005, and is described above. The chat participant list 1005 may include personalization items. The first chat participant may select a personalization item manually, or the personalization item may be selected automatically for the first chat participant. The personalization item may be rendered to the first chat participant as described above with respect to step 2432 of Fig. 25 and may be made perceivable to the second chat participant as described with respect to Figs. 24 and 25.

30 One or more of these personalization item may be transmitted to a second chat participant and rendered on the second chat participant system 305. The transmission of the personalization item may occur during machine-to-machine communications that are not visible to the user.

In one implementation, the second chat participant and/or the first chat participant may pay a subscription fee to access/use certain personalization item, and the personalization item may be provided by a third party. In another implementation, the personalization item expire and must be replaced after a predetermined event such as a
5 predetermined length of time, passage of a predetermined date, or a predetermined number of uses. Also, a personalization item may be banned if, for example, it is deemed to be offensive, inappropriate, or to otherwise violate a term of service agreement. If it is determined that the personalization item is expired or banned, display of such a personalization item will be disallowed and the user typically will be required to choose a
10 different personalization item.

In one implementation, the second chat participant and/or the first chat participant may pay a subscription fee to access/use certain personalization items, and the personalization items may be provided by a third party such as a server other than the chat host 310. In another implementation, the personalization items expire and must be
15 replaced after a predetermined event such as a predetermined length of time, passage of a predetermined date, or a predetermined number of uses. Also, a personalization item may be banned if, for example, it is deemed to be offensive, inappropriate, or to otherwise violate a term of service agreement. If it is determined that the personalization item is expired or banned, display of such a personalization item will be disallowed and the user
20 typically will be required to choose a different personalization item.

Other implementations are within the scope of the following claims. For example, one identifier could correspond to a group of personalization items, or a personalization item could have more than one identifier. As a further example, although the examples above are given in a chat message context, other communications systems
25 with similar attributes may be used. For example, personalization items may be used in a chat room or in e-mail communications. Also, the user interface may be a viewable interface, an audible interface, a tactile interface, or any combination of these.